

Shattered

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Shuttered

by [Morg47](#)

Summary

The ability to see people's souls when he looks into their eyes makes Will a great FBI agent. He learned at a young age not to look for too long or else he could make someone go mad, but that hasn't stopped him from getting glimpses when he needs to. For the most part, however, Will avoids seeing what the souls of the people around him look like. He learned during his time as a police officer to not let it matter for the relationships he had to build. It's easier to follow orders when he doesn't know if his superior has a corrupt soul.

It wasn't until Hannibal slid his blade into Will's gut that he first caught a glimpse of the other man's soul. He was surprised by what he saw considering what he knew about Hannibal.

Under constant surveillance by the FBI once he gets out of the hospital, Will moves onto campus to continue teaching future agents. Will doesn't expect Jack to show up at his classroom door or the case that Jack demands he help solve. Unfortunately for Jack, Will doesn't think he can solve it. At least, not on his own.

Notes

Had this idea floating around in my head. Figured I'd share it with you.

Since Will never goes after Hannibal after he gets out of the hospital, Hannibal never ends up in jail.

“There is no detail that is too small or one that could be considered insignificant. As investigators, it is your job to not only collect these tiny details but to fit them into the larger picture. A case cannot be solved unless you keep the larger picture in mind.”

“Sir?”

Will shuffled a few papers on his lectern to give him something to look at. He hadn't needed the papers to do his lectures in a long time. “Yes?”

“Is that how you solved the Hobbs case, sir? By keeping in mind the larger picture?”

Will let his gaze shift over his class. He was careful to never make eye contact with any of his students despite how they stared at him. That didn't stop him from catching glimpses of their emotions and thoughts. “That was trusting my instinct. We had tracked down the Minnesota Shrike to a local construction company. Hobbs didn't put all the information on his form like all the other sub-contractors we were looking at. I noticed the difference and have the experience to listen to my gut when it says something. The big picture part of that was that we were looking for someone that didn't want to be found while still being an intricate part of the community. The small detail was that he simply didn't fill in all his information on the form.”

Giving his students the time to jot down notes, Will returned to his papers. There wasn't much of his lecture left. He always gave himself time to field questions since they always inevitably came up.

“What about the case with the guy that-“

The sound of the door to the hall closing loudly cut off the girl's question. Will had no doubt that it was about one of the other cases that he had managed to solve for the FBI over the years.

Glancing out of the corner of his eye, Will took in the sight of Jack standing just inside the doorway. He didn't look the least bit contrite for interrupting his lecture. If anything, he looked smug.

Ignoring his guest, Will looked to the back wall of the hall. “Are there any other questions for me today? No? Then your assignment that is due in one week is to find three cases where the smallest detail completed the big picture to solve the case. I want a detailed description as to why that was so and how long it took the investigators to figure it out.”

Will held up his hand to stop some of the students as they began to pack up their belongings. “Despite what some of you might think, I will not find it flattering if you do three of the cases that I have solved. I would prefer that you don't use any, however, I will allow

you one without taking points off. Trust me, I have read every possible analysis of my cases over the years that I've been teaching. Please spare me from further suffering."

Some of the students chuckled nervously as if they weren't sure whether they should find it funny that Will was so self-deprecating or not.

Then Will dropped his hands and they finished packing up their things before making their way to the door. The door that Jack Crawford was still standing beside. Will ignored him while he packed up his lecture notes.

He wasn't deaf, however, and heard the students talking to Jack.

"Are you here to consult on a case, Mr. Crawford?"

Will heard Jack chuckle at the boldness of the student.

"While I wish I could say that I'm just here to see an old friend, I can't. I'm here on official business."

Huffing to himself, Will finished sliding his papers into his satchel before turning to the door. He caught sight of the last of his students ducking out of the hall before Jack started making his way toward him. "I don't want anything to do with why you're here."

Jack held his hands out as if to placate a scared animal. "Hear me out first, then decide."

Will clenched his jaw. He kept his eyes on Jack's left ear as he stood his ground. "I have no reason to do so. The last time I heard you out, I ended up getting my gut cut up and had to spend several months in a hospital recovering. Not to mention, Hannibal got away. And I told you, several times in fact, that he was the killer you were looking for. The disregard you gave to me at that time is the same I'm going to give to you now. I want nothing to do with you."

Jack dropped his hands as he leaned against one of the empty desks facing Will's lectern. "If that were true then you would have left with that nice Molly girl and moved to Florida. You wouldn't be teaching here."

Will ignored the jab about Molly as he tightened his grip on his bag. "You know why I'm here."

If Jack was the type of person to roll his eyes, he would have. Will knew that's what he wanted to express anyhow.

"You're here because you decided to be."

"Yeah, well, someone has to make sure that not every agent grows up to be like you."

Frowning at that, Jack crossed his arms over his chest. "He puts shards of mirrors in the eyes of his victims."

Will almost met Jack's gaze. He stopped himself just in time to stare at the bridge of Jack's nose. "You are a manipulating asshole."

"I am. I'm also the manipulating asshole that can't allow for another family to be killed."

"How many?"

"Two families in two months."

Will inhaled slowly. He dropped his gaze to his hands clenched around the strap of his bag that he had yet to sling over his shoulder. "And the pattern?"

"It tells us that he'll kill again. One family a month."

"When?"

"Around the full moon."

Will nodded down at the ground. "So in two weeks. He's probably already watching them."

"We think so, yes."

In that moment, Will was tempted to look into Jack's eyes. He wanted to see his soul. He wanted to know what sort of deformed monstrosity hid behind the kind face and warm smile. It would make it easier for him to walk away if he knew what kind of monster lived under the mask.

But as he always did now, Will didn't look. He kept his eyes too low and looked at Jack's nose. "I assume you have the case file for me or you wouldn't be here."

Jack shuffled his feet without dropping his arms from their crossed position over his chest. "I was hoping you would agree to visit the last crime scene."

Will paused as he lifted his strap over his head. "It's two weeks old."

"But untouched for one and half of them."

"Other people have undoubtedly gone through the evidence. You included."

"They have and I have."

Will dropped his eyes to the floor again. "I don't think it's a good idea."

Jack took a small step forward but didn't otherwise move. "All the mirrors in the house were smashed the night of the murders. We haven't had anyone clean it up yet. We didn't want to lose evidence if we did release it."

"Where?"

Jack took another small step forward. “The first family lived in Alabama. The second in Georgia.”

“So it took you a bit of time to connect them.”

“Hence the two weeks.”

Finally letting his strap rest over his shoulder, Will took a moment to settle his bag against his side. “You want to take me to Georgia. You think that’s safe?”

“He’s not going to get you, Will.”

For the second time in their conversation, Will had to stop himself from looking into Jack’s eyes. “Do you know where he is?”

“No.”

“Then you cannot promise me anything.”

Jack sighed. He shrugged his shoulders before turning to the door in time to see a couple of Will’s students peeking in through the window. He had to bite back a smile. It was always the dumb brave ones that made the best agents. “I’m leaving for Georgia in two hours. I would like for you to come along.”

Will stared at the back of Jack’s head for a few seconds before letting his shoulders slump. He couldn’t let any more families die. “I’ll be to your office in one.”

Jack didn’t bother to hide his smirk as he exited the lecture hall. He nodded to the few students still milling around in the hallway before heading to make arrangements for Will. He was sure to get a lecture from Alana, but it would be worth it to catch another serial killer.

Will stared at the closed door for a few seconds before sighing again. He ran his hand down his face before pulling out his phone. There wasn’t anyone for him to call or any arrangements for him to make. He could disappear from his life and the only people who would notice were his students.

Sometimes that freedom liberated him and sometimes it crushed him. He just wasn’t sure which one it was, at the moment.

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“It’s good to have you back, Graham.”

Will nodded at Beverly as he buckled into his seat on the plane. He hadn’t looked into her eyes and seen her soul since he prevented Hannibal from killing her. He figured he didn’t have the right to anymore.

Zeller and Price bickered with each other as they settled down into their seats. Neither one of them paid any attention to Will. He was perfectly fine with that.

The last person he expected to see was Alana Bloom. Her presence shocked him so much that he let his eyes flick over hers. For an instant, he could see Alana’s soul. It was a beautiful, colorful thing. It swirled with soft colors and he could hear the soft chiming of light music before he turned his gaze back to the seat before him. He was glad to see that she was moving better, even if she did have to use a cane still.

“Will, how are you?”

Closing his eyes in a slow blink, Will shrugged off the effect she had on him before he opened them again. “Fine.”

“I almost didn’t want to believe Jack when he told me you agreed to come along,” she said with a smile.

“I don’t want anyone else to get hurt. No one deserves to be targeted by a serial killer.”

Alana winced at that but didn’t lose her small smile. “You are a good man, Will Graham. Don’t let anyone ever tell you differently.”

There was a lot that Will wanted to say to argue with Alana about that. There were far too many people that Will manipulated or let die in his quest to catch killers. Some of them weren’t even in good faith that they would help his cause.

He was saved from having to say anything by Jack making his way onto the plane.

“Here’s the case file and all the information we have so far. There haven’t been any other families that fit the MO in any other states so we’re pretty certain he’s only done the two.”

Will nodded as he took the file. It was heavy but not as heavy as it should have been considering how many people had been killed. “I’ll look it over.”

Jack nodded at that before taking his seat and promptly leaning back and closing his eyes.

Will busied himself with the case file as the plane took off. He read through all the notes that everyone made and clarified details with Beverly or Price or Zeller when he needed to. They did good work. They always did good work. The three of them caught killers for Jack all the time. It was Will that worked a little differently and asked questions that most people didn’t need to know.

He was glad that they still respected him enough to answer them without judging him too harshly for asking in the first place.

When they touched down, Will didn't bother to switch on his phone.

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The ride to the house was silent. Jack drove like he knew where he was going and not like he was simply following the GPS app on his phone. Will took the time with just the two of them in the car to clear his mind of everything except the case file. He barely noticed when they parked in front of a large two-story house.

Jack led Will out of the car and up to the front door of the house. Will watched as Jack cut the tape and made note of who was there and at what time before he stepped back and handed Will the keys. Will stared down at the key in his hand for a moment before looking back up at Jack. "This isn't how he got in."

Jack pointed off to the side of the house as he shook his head. "No, we think he came in through the back."

Stalking off, Will rounded to the backside of the house. He took a moment to look up at the sky and around at the trees that blocked the yard from view of the neighbors. The houses were spread out enough that no one would have noticed someone lurking in the back. "They had a dog."

"Yes."

Will jerked out of his thoughts as he glanced to the corner of the house where Jack was standing. "Go wait in the car. You're distracting me."

He barely paid attention as Jack waved his hand and disappeared back around the corner of the house.

Instead, Will looked up at the darkening sky once more. The moon was barely a sliver in the sky. "If he kills on the night of a full moon then it would be easier to spot him out here. A dog would alert the family. They would have to be killed beforehand."

Will moved up to the back of the house before finding the spot where the glass had been cut away. He couldn't open the door that way but he had the keys so he unlocked it just the same.

The kitchen looked so ordinary that if Will didn't know that a gruesome murder had taken place in the house then he would have thought it was just a normal kitchen. He walked around and touched things here and there. He felt anger building up inside of him and let it, though he wasn't sure if he was starting to feel what the killer felt or if it was his own anger about what had happened to people who clearly didn't deserve it.

Making his way through the house, Will continued to stop and look at things that most people passed right by. There were a pair of shoes kicked off near the doorway from the entryway to the living room. They looked to be the right size for a boy that had gotten home from school and was eager to catch his afternoon cartoons.

There was homework still spread out on a desk bearing the stickers and praise from a teacher in the den.

A picture of the smiling family hung in the hall. The dog right there with them at the beach.

These were pieces of their lives that most people would have walked right by without a second thought. Will took them in. He took them in and let them build a picture of what this family had been like.

Once he had an understanding of them, he ascended the stairs. The murders took place all on the second story of the house. The children first, shot in their beds. They didn't suffer.

Will took a moment in each bedroom to examine more than the bloody beds and walls. He looked through the things on their dressers and desks. He took in the sight of trophies for little league baseball and dance. He acknowledged their lives before looking at their deaths.

The parents were last. The husband first and then the wife. The children were quickly brought into their parents' bedroom where the whole family was reunited in death.

Will stood at the side of the bed and saw them. The children sat on the floor along the wall. Their glassy eyes staring at him. Their faces slack in death. Their eyes accusing. They see too much.

The shards of mirrors.

Will closed his eyes and let his mind see it. The killer broke all the mirrors. He murdered the family and then broke all the mirrors. He brought the shards up to the bedroom and placed them in the eyes of his victims so that they could not look at him.

No, that wasn't right. He wanted them to see. He wanted them to see him, but not the him that he was. The him that he was becoming.

Will turned away from the children to face the bed once more. They were facing the bed. The husband was turned so that even as he lay in his deathbed, he could see his wife.

She was killed last.

Her body would still be warm and pliable.

He was fucking her corpse.

Will took a second to take a breath. There were a lot of sick people in the world, but people who did the things this killer did to the wife were some of the worst of them. He stole her life and then defiled her in death.

Sinking back into the murder, Will watched the necrophilic act take place. The wife's eyes were open. She was looking up at her killer and rapist. She had mirrors in her eyes like the others.

He just needed to see. If Will could see what she saw then he would know who the killer was.

Leaning over the bed, Will looked down into the wife's eyes. There were mirrors there but she was jerking too much with every thrust.

Reaching out, Will stilled her head. He looked down into her eyes, and for the first time in his life, he didn't see her soul. He saw his own.

Will couldn't breathe. Everything froze around him and in him as he stared into the tiny pieces of mirrors that showed him himself. His true self. He was disfigured and rotting. His soul was corrupt. He had avoided mirrors for almost his entire life so that he wouldn't see the truth about himself. And yet, here it was in the eyes of a dead woman.

He was a monster.

Gasping, Will jerked back and away from the bed. He didn't realize until he heard pounding on the front door that he'd been screaming.

On unsteady legs, Will backed out of the empty master bedroom. He knew that no matter how many times he tried to see the crime take place, he would not be able to see the killer.

Somehow, he made it down the stairs and to the front door. He scrambled with the lock for a second before throwing it open. It spoke volumes that Jack brushed past him with his gun out to check in the house as Will staggered out onto the front steps.

"What the hell was that?"

Will sucked in another breath before looking up at Jack without looking into his eyes. "The mirrors."

Jack frowned as he put his gun away before facing Will. "Yeah, he smashed them all and put pieces in their eyes."

"He was trying to make them see."

Jack took a step forward as Will moved down the stairs and onto the sidewalk leading up to the house. “Make them see what?”

Still trying to control his breathing, Will kept walking toward the car. There was nothing else that he was going to learn from the house.

“Make them see what, Will?”

Pausing with his hand on the door handle, Will turned back. He was far enough away from Jack, who was still standing by the open front door that he didn’t have to worry about meeting his eyes. “What he is becoming.”

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“So, what, we came all this way for nothing?”

“That’s not what he’s saying, Price.”

Will sighed as the others continued to argue over him in the hotel room. He wasn’t sure why he was there with them. He had told Jack everything he could about what he learned about the killer from the house. It was only because he had flown to Georgia that he was even bothering to look through the case file again.

Alana moved to sit next to Will before laying her hand on his arm. “I’m sure that you were very helpful to Jack and the others, Will. Don’t let them get you down because they wanted you to solve this on the first day.”

Will scoffed as he turned another page. “I know exactly what they want me to think. I know exactly what they think of me. Nothing they’re saying now is going to change anything.”

“Oh, great,” Zeller said as he threw himself down on the bed. “He knows what we think about him. That’s just great. How about you try figuring out what the murderer was thinking so that we can stop him.”

“Shut up, Brian. Will works differently than we do. Let him do his thing.”

“Whatever, Katz.”

Alana patted his arm again before removing her hand.

Will was grateful that she stopped touching him so he wouldn't have to shake her off. "I don't know what to tell you besides what you already know. He killed them and then made them watch his last despicable act. The mirror shards were more for the killer than they were for the victims. He wanted them to watch him but he wanted to be able to clearly see himself in their eyes. Just not the man that he is now. He wanted them to watch him as he does what he does to become something else. He's trying to evolve."

"I don't think," Price said as he sat down next to Zeller, "that murder makes you become something else."

"Not in your mind."

"Right, because I live in reality."

Will ignored both men as he continued to flip through the folder about the first family that was murdered. "He's going to continue until his transformation is complete. There's no telling what will actually trigger that."

"Will?"

Looking up from his file to stare at Alana's nose, Will made a questioning sound.

Alana shuffled a little in her seat as she looked back at him. "What do you usually do at this point in an investigation? You tend to make intuitive leaps that always seem to help us. What do you need to do in order to make those?"

Will stopped himself from snorting or scoffing or making any other sort of derogatory sound. Instead, he took a second to take a steady breath. "I usually talk over the case file and the things I saw and felt while walking through the murder scene. The extra perspective and questions someone else can ask will help my brain to piece together more of the clues that it can't fit together right now."

"And who do you usually do that with?"

Looking away from Alana, Will took another steady breath. "Well, before I would talk to my dogs. They weren't always very good at asking me questions, but sometimes being able to talk to them and describe things in a different order and in different ways helped some of the pieces fall into place."

Alana nodded. She reached out to touch Will again before thinking better of it and dropping her arm onto the table. "And when you weren't talking to your dogs?"

"I would talk to Hannibal. Just like Jack told me to the day he introduced me to him."

The room went silent at that. Just like Will knew that it was going to. They all tiptoed around the topic of Hannibal Lecter. None of them wanted to admit that they hadn't believed him when Will had tried to tell them what was happening to him. They had believed Lecter that Will was the one losing it and that he had done terrible things rather than the truth

that he'd been sick and Hannibal was using him. There were not enough 'I told you so's left in the world.

Not that Will had even once told them he was right about Hannibal. Not that he was ever going to.

"Well," Beverley said after a few minutes of tense silence, "I don't think that's an option. So what else could we do to help?"

Will bit back a wry grin as he dropped his gaze back to his case file. "I think I'm going to take this back to my room and read through it some more. Maybe I'll see if my pillows are any better at asking questions than my dogs were."

He left to the sounds of awkward chuckles from more than one person.

Once he was in the hall, Will took a second to close his eyes and breathe again. They could accept him when he could use his talents for them. Once he became useless, they'd cast him aside like everyone else in his life had.

Pulling himself together, Will continued on down the hall to where his room was located. He let himself in before dropping the case file off on the desk and sinking onto his bed. It wouldn't matter how many times he flipped through it, he had learned everything he could from it.

Sighing, Will pushed his glasses up and off his face and ran a hand through his hair. He tugged at the hair on the top of his head before squeezing the back of his neck. He massaged out some of the tension he felt there for a few minutes. Bringing his hand around to scratch at the scruff on his chin, Will stared up at the ceiling.

A knock sounded at the door, pulling Will from his spiraling thoughts. He sighed before he put his glasses in place and pushed himself to his feet. He pulled out the chair for the desk and flipped the file open to a random page before making his way to his door.

He wasn't surprised to find Jack on the other side. Will had known it was only a matter of time before one of the others went running to Jack to tell him about how Will had been talking about Hannibal.

Keeping his body in the doorway to his room, Will leaned against the open door. "What can I do for you, Jack?"

"The others told me that you hit a roadblock."

Once again making himself not show his true feelings, Will blinked a few times as he studied Jack's left ear. "Something like that."

"We need to catch this guy, Graham. Tell me what you need and I'll make it happen."

"A confession from the killer."

Jack scowled for a second before sighing. "Once you point him out to me, I'll get your confession."

"I don't understand what he's trying to become, Jack. And none of you can help me figure that out. You see things in black and white. It's good and bad for you. Even Alana can't see in shades of grey, which is great. I wouldn't want you any other way. That's how you get corrupt cops. I'm just saying, I can't talk this out with any of you because you wouldn't try to see it from the killer's point of view. He doesn't think he's doing anything wrong. He thinks he needs to do these things and that his victims are honored to be a part of it. And talking to any of you wouldn't get me anywhere because you can't see it that way. He's a terrible human being because he is murdering others. Yes, I understand that. We all understand that. We just don't understand his reasons for it."

Jack crossed his arms over his chest as he stared at Will. He frowned more and more as he heard the other man speak before sighing again. "What would you have me do? We have to catch this guy. We cannot let another family die. Whatever it takes, Will. I will make anything happen."

"This was so much easier when I could just call Hannibal," Will said as he stepped aside to let Jack into his room. They were past the point where they should be talking in a public hallway. "He was good at seeing it from their point-of-view."

"That's because he is a killer."

"Yes, Jack. I think I know that better than anyone. In fact, I don't think you would even know that if it wasn't for me."

Will wasn't facing Jack but he knew that the other man didn't have it in him to even look embarrassed by Will's words. They hadn't believed him until it was too late. Now they were all paying the price for that.

Jack looked down at the case file for a moment before looking back up at Will. He clenched his fists before letting his hands hang loose once more. "Have you tried?"

That made Will look over at him. "Tried what?"

"Calling him?"

Will swallowed hard before shaking his head. "Of course not. You know that."

Jack scoffed as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Maybe you should."

Will made himself look at Jack's face. He took in everything but his eyes. "You want me to call Hannibal and see if he's willing to talk to me about this case? What the fuck, Jack?"

Gritting his teeth, Jack scowled for a moment before clearing his throat. "We are running out of options, Will. We have to catch this guy in less than two weeks. You said it yourself, he's probably already stalking his next family."

“I can’t just call Hannibal, Jack.”

“Why not? We all know that you had a special relationship with him.”

The words were like a slap to the face. Will made certain that he did not show his reaction. “The only reason I had any sort of relationship with him was because of you. And when I tried to tell you who he truly was, you didn’t believe me. I almost died, Jack. We all almost died that night. I exposed him for what he truly was and he almost killed me before walking away. What makes you think he’d answer his phone if I called?”

“You won’t know if you don’t try.”

Will let his eyes slide closed for a second to make himself stay calm. “I wouldn’t be able to reach him, anyhow. I don’t know why we’re talking about this.”

“What do you mean?”

Will wanted to glare at him. He wanted to tell Jack just how much of a fucking idiot he was before pointing him to the door. “I don’t have his number, Jack. You know as well as I do that the number that he used to use is no longer in service. I have no way of contacting him.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“No,” Will said with a sigh. “You didn’t believe me then and I don’t expect you to believe me now. It doesn’t matter. I can’t call him. That’s that. You’ll just have to wait for more clues.”

Will wished he could say he was surprised when Jack slammed his fists down onto the desk. He wasn’t though. Jack only liked hearing what he wanted to hear. Anything else wasn’t good enough.

“We are not waiting for another family to get murdered, Graham. Figure this out!”

Taking another steady breath, Will stared at the landscape picture that hotel rooms always seemed to be in abundance of. “The only way that I’ll have a chance at speaking to him is if the FBI is not involved.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s a reason, Jack,” Will drawled, “that I live and work at Quantico. The director made it perfectly clear that I wasn’t to go anywhere or do anything. They weren’t happy that Hannibal got away. They’ve been looking for a reason to lock me up ever since I got out of the hospital. I’m monitored so heavily that I’m surprised that you let me have my own hotel room. We all know that you’re hoping to use me as bait. That if you keep me close, you’ll catch Hannibal trying to steal me away. It’s a stupid plan considering he doesn’t want me.”

“And what,” Jack said without disputing anything Will had told him, “you think getting away from your protection detail will allow for Hannibal to contact you? You think he won’t just finish the job and be done with it all?”

“You mean, do I think he’ll kill me?”

Jack nodded.

Will bit back a smirk at that. “Jack, I knew the moment Hannibal slide that blade into my gut that someday he would kill me. But you want to catch this killer, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Whatever it takes?”

“Yes.”

“At any cost?”

“Yes.”

Will wasn’t surprised that Jack didn’t hesitate. Even if it meant that Will would be sacrificed, Jack wanted his man. There was a reason that not many people lasted long under Jack. “Then tell them to back off. Let me go home.”

Jack studied Will as Will continued to stare at the painting on his hotel room wall. “We weren’t keeping you at Quantico in the hopes that Hannibal would try and come after you there. We know he isn’t stupid enough to risk that.”

Will didn’t blink at the lie.

Sighing, Jack turned away from Will. “Fine. I’ll get them to let you go unsupervised back to your house.”

“I won’t be able to stay there. If he does contact me, he’ll tell me to go somewhere else. I’ll have to do what he says in order to get his help.”

“Whatever it takes, Will. If another family dies, it is on your hands.”

Will didn’t move as Jack left his hotel room. He’d learned long ago that just because Jack said something with conviction, it didn’t make it true.

With a sigh, he sat down before pulling out his phone and turning it on for the first time since they landed. He pulled up the website and booked himself a ticket. He had a few hours to kill before the flight would leave, but that just gave him plenty of time to think about what it was that he was doing.

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Will stood in line at security in the airport with no luggage. He had brought a carry-on bag with him when he'd flown down with the others, but he'd left it at the hotel along with his phone and badge. The only thing he did carry was his wallet. Once he was through security, he was going to do a little airport shopping and change his outfit. It wouldn't do to stay in the same clothes. Will was well aware of what lengths the FBI could go to in order to track someone.

"I'm sorry, sir. We need you to step to the side."

Looking up without looking into the guards' eyes, Will nodded and moved as the man asked. He hadn't been through an airport in a long time, but he wasn't surprised that they found him suspicious. "Is there anything wrong?"

"The scanner picked up a spike. We just want to use the smaller one to figure out if it is anything we need to worry about."

Will held out his arms and put his feet into the spots on the floor as indicated by the guard. "Feel free to do whatever you need to do."

The man waved the wand in his hand over Will's arms and legs. He slid it down his back and brought it around to sweep it past his stomach. Will made sure not to let his face change when it made a small blip near his stomach.

"Lift your shirt for me, please."

Will did as instructed.

The guard whistled at the sight of the scar on Will's stomach. "That looks like it hurt. Did you have to have anything metal inserted? The scanners sometimes pick up on screws and plates from surgeries."

Will hadn't. "Yes, there's a bit from a drain tube still inside. It had completely slipped my mind. I'm terribly sorry for the inconvenience."

The guard smiled and motioned for Will to grab his shoes and wallet. "Sorry for pulling you out of line. Have a good flight."

Will nodded without looking at the man. "Have a good day."

He made his way through the rest of security until he found a bathroom. He ducked inside and found an empty stall before he lifted his shirt and stared down at his stomach. He sucked in a few quick breaths before biting his fist and making himself stay calm. He almost couldn't believe it.

Will felt along the scar for a few seconds until he found the lump he was sure didn't belong. He hadn't ever bothered to touch it before. If not for that security guard, he wouldn't have been aware that it existed. Pulling his other hand out of his mouth, Will wiped his spit off his hand onto his shirt before letting it drop back into place. This didn't change his plans. It just added an extra step.

Flushing the toilet and fixing his face, Will stepped out of the stall and to the sinks. He washed his hands while avoiding his face in the mirror before leaving.

His first stop was an ATM. Will withdrew all the cash that he could from his cards and pocketed it before heading off down the hall. He was sure that the withdrawal had already been flagged by whoever was watching him.

His second move was to duck into a shop where he picked out a shirt and a pair of shorts that he'd seen plenty of other people wearing. He bought a dark ball cap and a new pair of sandals. Then he made his way down the terminal to where a small spa sat. It was filled with mostly women and girls getting their nails done while they waited for their next flight.

Will walked up to the counter with a small smile in place. He ducked his head before he coughed. "Excuse me, is there anyone here that knows how to cut hair? I was hoping to get cleaned up a little before getting on my flight. I'm on my way to meet a girl I've been chatting with online. It's our first meeting and I didn't realize how shabby I looked until I got here."

The girl smiled at him though Will didn't see much more of her face than that. "We're a massage and nail place, but I know that Kim can cut hair. Let me ask if she'd be willing to help you out."

Will returned the smile. "I'd really appreciate that. If there is any chance that you might have a spare razor for me to use, I'd be awfully grateful."

The smile from the girl grew. Will wasn't surprised when she leaned closer to the counter. "You would look much more handsome without the beard. I'm sure we can work something out."

Nodding, Will said thanks before stepping back to let the girl at the desk go and talk to Kim. He glanced out the door and noted the security camera that caught the front of the shop. There didn't seem to be one inside of it, but he was going to have to time his leave carefully.

Kim did, in fact, agree to cut his hair. Will asked that she just take off a few inches from his curls. He wanted it shorter without having it gone. She also let him shave and clean

up his face. He took a second to change into his new clothes and put the old ones he'd been wearing into the bag.

Will made sure that his cash was tucked safely into a pocket before taking his ID, credit card, and debit card out of his wallet. He left everything else in it before slipping it into the bag with his old clothes.

"How much do I owe you, ladies?"

The girls giggled as Will smiled at them and gave them quite a bit more than they asked for. He made sure to stick around and flirt long enough that he could slip into a crowd as it walked by the spa. He was certain that he'd have to do some more camera dodging tricks before whoever was watching him truly lost sight of him.

Slouching, Will slipped his glasses off and acted like he was with some of the other people walking around until they went into a shop. He poked around at a few things before finding what he needed.

Taking the fountain pen and other little bits of stationery with him, Will went to the counter. "I've been looking for one of these for a while. This one doesn't have any ink in it, does it?"

The cashier smiled before taking the pen from his hands. "No," he said, "the box says it is empty but there are cartridges in there that you can use to fill it."

"Thanks," Will said with a small smile. "I lost my glasses and can't read well without them. I appreciate you letting me know."

The man just smiled before asking for money. Will handed it over without saying anything else. He left the store with his pen in one hand and his bag of old clothes in the other.

The next store that he ducked into was a convenience store. Will grabbed a couple of overpriced sandwiches, a couple of bottles of water, a pack of bandages, a pack of superglue, and a couple of souvenir handkerchiefs. He acted like he was in a hurry and quickly left the store. He made his way to another bathroom area. He waited for the people using the family bathrooms to leave before he went in and locked the door.

Will clenched his teeth as he peeled off his new shirt. He slid his purchases onto the counter while taking steady breaths. The bathroom he'd picked wouldn't allow anyone else to come in until he left. It was a single stall room with a changing table on one wall. Will tucked his old shirt into his new shorts and took a few more breaths before opening his new pen and running it under the water. He soaped it up and rinsed it well before stuffing one of the handkerchiefs into his mouth. The little airplanes along the edge of it caught his eye in the mirror. He grimaced at them before looking back down at his belly.

Whimpering softly, Will felt around until he found the small lump once more. He took a few more breaths before bringing the tip of the pen to his stomach and using the sharp

tip to cut into his flesh. It stung like he'd known it would. He was grateful for his self-made gag as he dug the pen in a little further.

Once he had a hole in his gut, Will ignored the blood slowly dripping out and stuck the pen inside a little further. He pushed on the lump with his other hand and brought it closer to the incision he'd made. Groaning, Will pulled the little device out of himself before collapsing forward onto the sink. He sucked breaths in through his nose for a few minutes before he stood up and removed his gag.

Taking a shaky breath in, Will pulled his old shirt out of his pants to hold it against his wound. He got a few paper towels wet and wiped some of the blood off his stomach before getting his glue open and shutting his wound once more. It wasn't going to hold for as long as he would like, but it would do for the moment.

Cleaning up the blood he had spilled was easier once he wasn't still bleeding. Will ignored the little device sitting on the counter as he wiped the blood off of himself and then the floor and the counter. He put the bandages he'd gotten over his glued shut cut and put his shirt back on. He put everything in the trash or into his bag before finally taking a second to look at the little thing he'd pulled out of himself.

Rinsing it carefully in the sink, Will looked down at the little tracking device. It had been put in him, no doubt, when he'd been unconscious in the hospital after Hannibal had cut him open and left him to suffer.

Clenching it in one hand, Will took another steadying breath. He was sure that the FBI had its reasons for putting a chip in him like some kind of pet. He was certain that if he confronted anyone about it they would tell him it was for his own safety.

Funny how he didn't feel safe now that he knew about it.

Will picked up his things and checked the bathroom once more before leaving it. There was a family that was waiting that he was sure were giving him dirty looks. Will ignored them as he made his way to his gate.

They knew where he was going. It would be pointless to not get on the plane. Once he got to Dulles he would have to make a decision. The FBI would expect him to go somewhere they thought held meaning for him. Somewhere they could set up surveillance and keep track of him until Hannibal showed his hand and they could catch him, too.

Jack said they'd do anything to prevent another family from being slaughtered, but Will knew that the lure of the Chesapeake Ripper was too much for even Jack to ignore in favor of their current murderer.

Will checked in with the other passengers and took his seat on the plane. He took the little device out of his pocket and slipped it into the bag of the man sitting next to him when the guy was too busy looking out the window. Once they realized that Will no longer had the tracker in his gut, they would begin scouring all the cameras in the airports. He had to hope his actions so far would buy him more time.

It wouldn't be Wolf Trap. Will knew that. He had no reason to go there. It wouldn't be Hannibal's home or office. There had to be a place that he could go that Hannibal would know about him going to that the FBI wouldn't.

Will closed his eyes and leaned back as the plane pulled away from the gate. His little wardrobe change and camera avoidance would gain him time. He would need to keep it up in DC in order to get even more. He had to use this time to figure out where he needed to go.

Will wasn't sure when he fell asleep, but he knew he was dreaming when he found himself on a road in downtown Baltimore. He wasn't sure what he was doing there until a snort had him turning to look at the ravenstag that had haunted him before. When it started walking away from him, Will followed it.

The giant beast clopped along the empty street with Will behind it for several blocks. Will knew they were in an area that Hannibal had driven him through before, but he wasn't sure where they were going until they turned and came upon a small park. There was someone waiting for him near the tree line. The person was shrouded in darkness, though Will knew who it was.

The ravenstag urged him on, but Will found that he could not look away from the man waiting for him even if he couldn't quite see him. He took step after step despite how his mind told him not to. He was caught in the man's pull. Will couldn't see him but he knew who it was. He just needed to get to him even if he wasn't sure he wanted to.

"Sir?"

Will jerked awake with a gasp. "What?"

"We've landed."

Will hated airplanes. He hated sleeping on airplanes even more. He nodded at the attendant before he got up and grabbed his bag of clothes from below the seat in front of him. He dumped the entire thing in the trash on his way to the gate before pulling his hat a little lower over his face.

Scanning the crowd, Will slipped in with a group of men around his age. He followed them out of the terminal and toward the baggage claim. He thought, for a moment, about taking someone else's bags just to throw off the people who were sure to watch this later but decided not to. Airports were bad enough without people stealing things.

Will switched from one group to another without drawing attention to himself until he made it out of the airport and into a taxi. "The nearest park, please."

"Sure thing. We have a nice one just a few minutes away. I don't blame you for wanting to get away from the crowds for a bit. Travel always makes me want to spend some time on the ground in a peaceful place."

Will let the words of the driver wash over him as he sat back against the seat. He paid the man extra when he climbed out and told him to keep the change.

He didn't know where he was going, but Will figured that was a good thing. If he didn't know then the FBI didn't know. Then again, he wasn't sure how Hannibal would find him either.

With a sigh, Will sunk down onto an empty bench. His stomach twinged at him but an inspection of his shirt showed him that he wasn't bleeding through, yet. He was going to have to seek medical attention soon. A clinic nearby would be too obvious. The FBI was sure to ask around once they realized his tracker had been removed.

Will lifted his head to look at the tops of the trees in front of him. He let out another breath before closing his eyes once more. He wasn't sure if his dream was just a dream or if his subconscious was trying to tell him something. He needed to figure out where he was going.

Letting out another sigh, Will dropped his head until his chin rested against his chest. He'd been under the thumb of the FBI for so long that it felt nice to sit in the park and know that no one knew where he was.

"Mr. Graham?"

Well, apparently not no one.

Will lifted his head to look at the man before him. The stranger was wearing a pair of sunglasses so dark that Will could not see his eyes. He wasn't sure if that had been on purpose or not. "Who is asking?"

"I was told to deliver this to you."

Will stared, for a moment, at the envelope held out to him. The richness of the paper told him exactly who it was from. "How did you know that I would be here?"

"I didn't, but the man who told me to bring it to you was certain."

Will rubbed at his chin for a second before he reached out to take it. The man who gave it to him turned around and walked away without another word. Will let him go.

Swallowing heavily, Will turned the envelope over in his hands several times. His name was written across the front in a familiar scrawl. He swallowed again before he flipped it over and lifted the flap.

Dearest William,

I find myself rather pleased now that you have escaped your shadows and have stepped into the light. I am certain that you have questions for me. I will be delighted to answer them for you when you get here. As for the one I know that you would like the answer to the most, I shall simply remind you of the conversation we had once where you told me that if you gained freedom you would simply 'go somewhere green'. This seemed the most logical choice.

There is a car waiting for you at the west entrance to the park. Simply show the driver this envelope and he will bring you to the next location. I am afraid I cannot meet you there. There are too many people still searching for you. We will have to make sure that you are truly free before meeting once more.

I look forward to seeing you again, my dearest William. Please don't keep me waiting.

Your humble servant,

Hannibal Lecter.

Will read through the letter twice before covering his mouth with his hand to block his smile. He should have known that Hannibal was likely to already be aware of what he was doing. The man had far more connections than the FBI could have ever known about.

With his next step decided, Will stayed on the park bench for a few moments more. Hannibal's tone in the letter hadn't seemed like Will should be in a rush. He knew that he couldn't wait too long, but he could enjoy a few minutes in the park without too much worry.

When he felt like he'd sat there long enough, Will heaved himself to his feet. He took notice of the position of the sun before he made his way to the west entrance of the park. A car was parked not too far down the road. A man stood beside one of the rear doors. Will showed him the envelope.

The man nodded to him before he opened the door and motioned for Will to slide in. Will couldn't help but notice that he was also wearing dark colored sunglasses. Will didn't have to worry about seeing too much of him.

"I have been instructed to let you know that this will be a four hour journey. There is bottled water and snacks for you in the cooler in the back. Please help yourself."

Will looked at the cooler but didn't open. He leaned his head back against his seat and watched out the window as the man took him out of DC. He wasn't sure where he was going but found he wasn't upset by that.

XXX

The house that Will was brought to was quite large. It was made to look like a cabin in the woods, but the enormous size of it gave away how modern it was. Will decided it was exactly the type of cabin that Hannibal would live in if he was told he had to live in one.

The driver got out and opened Will's door. He stood to the side as Will got out before reaching in and pulling out the cooler. "Please enjoy your stay," he said before he got into his car and drove away.

Will was abandoned there and found that he didn't mind. He spent the last several years with his every move known. Being somewhere unknown was appealing.

The door was unlocked. Will pushed it open with the cooler in one hand as he looked around the entrance. It was clear that this was not a house that people lived in. Will wondered as he moved down a hall and into the kitchen, if Hannibal owned it or if he had rented it for this purpose.

The kitchen was fully stocked, not that that surprised Will. He took an apple with him as he wandered through the house. The other rooms were furnished, though not with anything personal. The upstairs held several rooms. There was a bag on the bed in the master bedroom.

The note on top read:

Since you have not brought any luggage of your own I bought you some things to wear.

Will was almost afraid to open the bag and see what sort of clothing Hannibal meant to dress him up in. The desire to no longer smell like an airport had him opening the suitcase anyhow. He was happy to find that it mostly contained dark jeans and soft shirts. The clothing was sure to be more expensive than those he had worn before, but Will found that he liked them all the same.

He showered and used the products that had been left for him on the counter. He took a moment to look at his new haircut in the mirror. It suited him just fine. All while avoiding his own eyes, Will looked at himself before checking his stomach. The wound was still being held closed by the superglue he'd used at the airport. He would need someone who knew what they were doing to look at it soon, but for now, it was fine. Turning away from the mirror, he dressed in jeans and a dark green shirt.

Returning to the kitchen, Will looked through the food that he had before deciding to make something light and easy for supper. After he ate and cleaned up after himself, Will retired to the bedroom. He moved his bag of clothing from Hannibal to the floor before taking off his jeans and crawling in between the sheets.

Escaping from the FBI was more exhausting than he'd thought it would be.

XXX

Will woke to the smell of something cooking. Not just anything. The smell of meat. Someone else was in the house with him. Someone had come in while he'd been asleep.

Rubbing his face, Will sat up in the bed. He figured he shouldn't be too surprised since he didn't bother to lock any of the doors. With a yawn, he climbed out of bed and grabbed the jeans that Hannibal had gifted him. He made a quick stop in the bathroom to relieve himself and wash his face before redressing and heading out of the room.

He was still rubbing sleep from his eyes as he entered the kitchen.

Will wasn't certain, until he froze in the doorway, about what he'd been expecting. Part of him hadn't thought it would be Hannibal standing at the counter with a knife in his hands. Part of him had hoped that it would be.

He looked good despite the years that had gone by. The only major change in him that Will could see was that his hair held a little more grey than it had before. Nothing else about him had really changed. Will didn't know if that was because Hannibal was too vain or if it was because he was too confident.

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal said without looking up from where he was slicing vegetables.

“Hannibal,” Will replied.

“Won’t you come in and sit down? This is almost finished.”

Will ran his hand through his hair as he stepped into the kitchen fully. “What are you making?”

Hannibal rinsed off the peppers before he began to slice them like he had the tomatoes and mushrooms. “Just a protein scramble.”

“Ah,” Will said as he sat at the counter. “You’re bringing us full circle.”

Hannibal smiled at that as he continued to scramble the eggs he was making. “It warms me that you remember the first meal I made for us to share.”

“Seeing as there was a time where I wasn’t sure what was real and what wasn’t, I tried to commit the true moments to memory.”

Hannibal didn’t react to that statement the way that Will had thought he might. It was almost relaxing to not know just how Hannibal was going to act or react to him. The fact that that little jibe hadn’t gotten a reaction made Will relax. He would try not to make any other cutting comments about their past. It was time to move forward.

“Have you found any more truth to your memories since I last saw you?”

Will smiled to himself as Hannibal pulled him out of his thoughts. “Already back to psychoanalyzing me, doctor?”

The corners of Hannibal’s lips ticked up as he smiled at that without looking up from the pan he was using as he added in the peppers, tomatoes, and mushrooms. “I must say, I greatly enjoy understanding how your mind works. I can’t help that I’m a little curious about how our separation has changed things.”

Will made sure to keep his eyes on the knot of Hannibal’s tie. “The way that my mind works has changed very little since the last time we were together. It is the thoughts that I think that have changed.”

Hannibal paused at that. Will was certain that anyone else wouldn’t have noticed, but Will had been looking for it.

Hannibal pulled the pan from the heat before serving the scramble onto two plates. He sprinkled shredded cheese over the top of them before adding a few herbs. He looked up at Will as he slid his plate across the counter to where he sat. “Do you wish to share those thoughts with me?”

Will took the fork that Hannibal offered him. He looked down at the scramble before scooping up a bit of egg and sausage onto his fork. He lifted his eyes to Hannibal’s

chin as he ate it.

Hannibal swallowed hard.

Will made sure to clear his mouth before he spoke. There was no need to start off their reunion by being rude. "I need your help, doctor."

"I am at your service."

Will smiled at that as he took another bite of his food. "Are you going to eat, Hannibal?"

Hannibal moved as if it had been his intention to wait the entire time he had before he took his own fork and moved to sit beside Will at the counter.

They ate in silence for several minutes. Will finished his meal before rising to find a glass for water. He waved off Hannibal's apologies for not thinking to set one out for him as he filled the glass at the sink. He turned to lean against it and watched Hannibal as the other man ate his food.

Will sipped his water before he cleared his throat. "There's something I need to tell you that I haven't told anyone since my father forbade me to when I was young."

"Ah, yes. Fathers can be quite influential on their young sons. Is this what most consider a deep dark secret, Will?"

Will snorted at that before he took another drink of his water. "Once I figure out how to word what I need to tell you, I'll tell you. Just know that I need you to be open-minded about what I tell you."

"When it comes to you, dear William, my mind is always open."

Will shook his head at that before leaning over the counter to snag his plate and Hannibal's. He grimaced as the edge pressed into his stomach.

"Are you all right?"

"I told you that I need your help, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal was on his feet and around the counter before Will was able to deposit the plates into the sink. With his hands full, Will was unable to stop Hannibal from lifting his shirt to expose his scar and bandaged abdomen.

Hannibal stared at the small red spot of blood on the gauze for a moment before he lifted his gaze to Will's eyes. Will, of course, wasn't looking at him but over at the sink. "What happened?"

"Seems the FBI decided to use the *opportunity* that you gave them to have me chipped."

Will watched out of the corner of his eyes as Hannibal bared his teeth. It was a smile that was definitely not a smile. The way his body tensed was enough for Will to know how angry Hannibal was.

“What did they do, William?”

Will turned his head to rest his gaze on Hannibal’s nose. “They chipped me like a dog. One that they obviously thought would stray eventually and would need to be collected.”

The noise that came out of Hannibal’s throat couldn’t be described as anything other than a growl. It made Will bare his own teeth in a dark smile.

“What did you do?”

Will turned out of Hannibal’s grip to place the dirty plates in the sink. “Go grab your medical bag, Hannibal. I’ll meet you in the living room once I’ve put these into the dishwasher. I’ll let you poke and prod all you want while I tell you about my escape.”

Keeping his eyes on his task, Will counted in his head as Hannibal stood frozen for another seven seconds before he turned to do as Will told him to. They had to relearn each other after being apart for so long. Will was going to make sure that Hannibal learned that Will wasn’t going to be so easily manipulated anymore.

Drying his hands, Will left the kitchen for the large living space. The couch was wide enough that he knew that he and Hannibal could both lay on it together without smothering one another. He stripped out of his shirt before dropping it down onto the couch. It wouldn’t do to have his blood get into the upholstery. “Hannibal? Will you bring a towel, too?”

“I have one.”

Will looked over in time to see Hannibal enter through a different door with a large towel, a bowl of hot water, and his medical bag. “Do you want me to lay on the towel?”

Hannibal’s eyes were locked onto Will’s abdomen as he spoke, “Are you expecting to do a lot of bleeding?”

“That depends on you, doctor.”

Hannibal set the things he was carrying down on the table before dropping to one knee in front of Will. He looked up at the other man in time to catch the widening of his eyes as he jerked his gaze to the far wall. “May I?”

Will sucked in a shaky breath before nodding. “I didn’t have much I could use since I was already through security when I had to get it out.”

Hannibal hummed as he removed the bandage that Will had put on himself. The cut was small and oddly shaped. “I think I would like to hear the story now.”

Smiling at that, Will reached out to rest one hand on Hannibal's shoulder as the doctor kneeling before him poked at his stomach. "I set the alarm off when I went through security."

"They pulled you to the side."

"Yes. I told them it was from when I had this happen and a bit of metal got stuck inside. They let me go easily enough."

Hannibal pushed against Will's stomach to feel for any fluid that was somewhere it shouldn't be. "But you knew what it was."

"The FBI hasn't let me leave the campus for months. They told me it would be in my best interest to stay put. They assured me they would take care of my house and my dogs but I was to remain at the academy."

"And you did."

"I didn't want to go back to the BSHCI. That and I didn't really have anywhere else to go."

Hannibal made a small considering sound at that. "What changed?"

Will looked down at Hannibal's head as he continued to feel Will's stomach. "Jack."

"And how is our dear Jack?"

"The same as he always is."

Hannibal's words came out a little sharper as he tested the strength of the glue. It was not going to hold together for much longer. "What did the same old Jack want with you, William?"

"The same as he always does."

"Ah, to catch a killer."

"There is a man that is killing families. Jack wanted him caught. So he came to me and asked me to help."

"I'm sure there was very little asking," Hannibal said as he leaned back to look back up at Will.

Will smiled at that as Hannibal got back to his feet. "What's the prognosis, doctor? Will I live?"

"For some years yet, I believe."

Turning his head, Will caught Hannibal's left ear in his gaze. "Good. What do you need me to do?"

Hannibal stepped back to put a small amount of space between them before gesturing for Will to lay down on the towel. "Has it bled much?"

"Not since I glued it shut in the airport bathroom."

"Superglue?"

"That was my only option. I needed it out and knew I couldn't leave and come back through security without it."

Hannibal dipped his head in a nod. "What did you use to remove it?"

"A pen."

Will had to bite back his smile as Hannibal sharply looked up at him. Whatever the good doctor was expecting to hear, it wasn't that.

Will let himself stretch out on the couch for a moment. He let Hannibal just look at him before he relaxed onto the towel. "I went to a store and found one of those fountain pens that you load the ink into. It was empty but the tip is quite sharp. Then I went to another store and found some bandages, superglue, and few other odds and ends I needed."

Hannibal sat on the coffee table next to the couch as Will spoke. He snapped on his latex gloves before dipping the clean rag he'd brought into the hot water and began to clean Will's stomach. He was careful around the scar that he'd left there the last time they'd seen each other. "You performed minor surgery on yourself in an airport bathroom. With a pen."

"Yes," Will let his eyes slip closed as Hannibal cleaned him. "I waited until I could use a family bathroom and locked myself in. Then I tucked my old shirt into my pants and gagged myself. I found the chip. I pulled it close to the surface and then pressed the tip of the pen through my stomach until I could work it out. Then I cleaned myself up, glued the hole shut, put on my new shirt, and left."

"Where is the chip now?"

"I'm not sure. I slipped it into the bag of the man that sat beside me on the airplane."

Hannibal rinsed the rag before wiping more of the blood away. The glue had done its job for the most part. It needed to be touched up. "You bought new clothes?"

"I figured that once the FBI realized that I had removed the chip, they'd be tracking me on the airport cameras. So I got new clothes and shoes. I went to a spa and paid them to cut my hair and let me shave."

"They'll still recognize you."

“I wasn’t trying to disappear. I was just trying to make it difficult for them. The longer they’re trying to figure out which person is me, the longer I had to get away.”

“I suspect out of everyone,” Hannibal said, as he worked the glue out of Will’s wound, “you would know how to escape the FBI best.”

Will shook his head at that but otherwise didn’t move. “The FBI flew me down to Georgia to see the crime scene. If I had decided to drive back, I wouldn’t have known about the chip. They’d be aware of where I was without me ever knowing.”

Hannibal tilted his head to the side to catch sight of Will’s face out of the corner of his eye while he continued to check the wound in Will’s stomach. He needed to open it up further to make certain that Will hadn’t hit anything with the pen. “I’m going to apply a local anesthetic.”

“Okay.”

“Do you wish to know why?”

“Sure.”

“Will?”

Will opened his eyes but did not meet Hannibal’s gaze. “Why do I need to be numb, Hannibal?”

“Because I need to make the incision a little bigger to make certain that your pen didn’t nick your intestines or anything else. I will not allow you to slowly die because the FBI overreached in regards to your human rights.”

“Okay.”

Hannibal looked down at the scar on Will’s stomach for a moment before he slowly lifted his hand to run his fingers along it. “You would let me?”

“Hmmm?”

“You would trust me to bring a knife to you once more?”

“I would.”

Hannibal pulled his hands back before dipping his head down. It was a nod but not. It was an acceptance of the trust and responsibility that Will was giving him.

“I will need to place more than a towel down.”

“Get whatever you need, Hannibal. I won’t move until you tell me to.”

Hannibal took a small piece of gauze and held it to the small bleeding wound in Will’s gut. “Please hold this tightly until I return.”

Will let Hannibal move his hand until he was keeping pressure on his wound. He let his eyes slip shut once more as he listened to Hannibal move around the house. He wasn't in danger of falling back asleep, but he did allow himself to relax more.

"Will?"

"Yes?"

"I need for you to stand up for a moment. Try not to let the pressure go from your hand."

Will maneuvered himself, with Hannibal's help, until he was standing. He watched through half-open eyes as Hannibal picked up the clean towel before taking Will's hand once more. "Where are we going?"

"It'll be easier for me if you are on a more stable surface."

"The kitchen table. Really, Hannibal?"

Hannibal couldn't help the upturn of his lips at the sound of Will's laughter. "I swear that I mean to perform minor surgery in the effort to make sure you are whole and healthy."

Will couldn't help his grin as he let Hannibal help him onto the table. He laid down with his head on a pillow without letting go of his wound. "Just as long as you are aware that you have to ask me first before you take a kidney and serve it to me."

Hannibal dropped the towel he'd been picking up. "I will make a note of that."

"See that you do."

Will knew what he was doing. Hannibal had been trying since the first letter in that park to put Will at ease and make him seem trustworthy despite everything that had happened. He just wasn't aware that Will did trust him.

"You know, I told Jack before I left him in that shitty hotel in Georgia that in order to figure out who was killing those families that I would have to speak with you."

"Did you?" Hannibal murmured while continuing to ready his supplies.

"Yes. He must have known about the chip. He was too eager to agree to let me put myself into the opening for you to make a move."

"Did he think I would take you or kill you?"

Will winced as he felt the first needle pierce his skin. "It was probably a bit of both as long as one or the other happened. He wants to catch this killer but he wants to catch you more than anything."

“And do you think talking to me will help you catch them?”

Will didn't flinch at the second shot. He let Hannibal move his hand away from his wound and set it on the table off to the side. “If I fall asleep, it's just because I'm tired.”

Hannibal chuckled at that. “I'll make sure to be as gentle as possible so I don't disturb you if you do.”

“I appreciate that. I'm not sure I want to talk to you about those murders.”

“Why not?”

Will sighed before answering. “Because Jack wanted to use me to use you to do his job.”

“You have escaped the leash and collar. You no longer want to be the FBI's good dog.”

Will hummed at that. He felt it when Hannibal made the hole in his stomach wider. There was no pain. “Something like that.”

“You want to let more families be killed.”

“I don't think so.”

“Will this be another thing you tell me when you find the words?”

Will smiled at that. He turned his head to watch the side of Hannibal's face as he worked. Slowly, Will reached out until his hand was resting on Hannibal's elbow.

Hannibal froze at Will's touch. “Will?”

“I would have you know me, Hannibal. I would share my thoughts with you.”

Hannibal blinked once before he turned his head. He did not try to force eye contact with Will. “You would?”

“Yes, but you must let me find the words to share them. If there is ever a time that I cannot, I will find a different way to show you. Do you understand?”

“Yes.”

The word was hardly breathed out but it was enough. Will let his hand slip from its hold on Hannibal to rest back on the table. “Please work quickly. I'm not in any pain, but it feels weird to have your fingers inside me this way.”

Hannibal held himself still for a second longer before returning to his task. He felt through the small opening to check Will's organs and guts. He found everything in order and to his satisfaction. “You did a remarkable job with yourself, Will.”

“Did you just make a pen joke?”

“Not on purpose.”

“Sure.”

Hannibal smiled as he began to stitch Will closed. “We will have to keep an eye on these stitches for at least a week. Stomach wounds can be dangerous. You will need to get plenty of rest and don’t do anything too strenuous.”

“I have survived a stomach wound before. Seeing as you’re touching the scar, I know that you know that.”

“Seeing as I’m the one that sliced into you with a knife, I do know that.”

“Funny thing, you cutting me up.”

“What do you mean?”

Will smirked as he closed his eyes once more. “Let me sleep here for a little bit, okay?”

“Why was that funny, Will?”

Will yawned before he answered. “Everyone in the hospital told me how lucky I was that you didn’t hit anything. They said it would have barely taken a nick to any of my organs and I would have been in danger of dying. But the thing is, I knew that I was never in that kind of danger.”

“Will?”

“You hurt me, but that was because I hurt you, too.”

Hannibal was silent as he continued to work to close the wound he’d made to Will’s abdomen.

Will let his eyes slit open to see Hannibal’s face before he smiled again. “Despite everything, I trusted you then. Still trust you now.”

Hannibal froze for another second before resuming his task. He said no more as Will fell asleep while Hannibal was working on him. There was no greater sign of trust than that.

Will woke in the bed in the master bedroom. He smiled as he stretched before dragging his fingers gently across his bandages. He still felt a little numb but otherwise had very little pain. Hannibal was a great doctor. Despite his murderous tendencies, Will was glad to have had him there to look after him.

“Will, are you awake?”

“You can come in, Hannibal.”

Hannibal pushed through the door with a tray in his hands. “I’m going to recommend that you stick to light meals for the next few days.”

“If that’s what you think is best.”

Hannibal dipped his head as he placed the tray on the nightstand. He helped Will to sit up and arrange the pillows to his liking before handing him a mug. “I would also like for you to stay in this bed for at least forty-eight hours. You can make trips to the bathroom but otherwise, you should rest your stomach muscles.”

Will sighed as he held the cup to his nose. It was clear that he was being given some sort of tea. “I suppose if those are the doctor’s orders then I shall have to obey.”

“I feel that you are being too agreeable.”

Smirking at that, Will sipped his tea for a moment before looking over at Hannibal’s shoulder. “I am aware that this is what is best for my health. I didn’t like having to perform surgery on myself in an airport bathroom. I will take your advice and just rest.”

“Will.”

Still smirking, Will let his head rest back against his pillows. He closed his eyes before humming a bit. “Though I suppose if I’m going to stay in bed for two days, I will need some form of entertainment.”

Hannibal sighed. It was barely a breath of air, but Will heard it all the same. “I would not leave you here to languish.”

Will had to bite back the retort on the tip of his tongue. He didn’t want to hit upon old wounds. He wanted to move forward. “When will I be able to bathe again?”

“I can wipe you down as you need it. You will have to keep your stitches out of water for at least a few days. I don’t want to have to remove them just to put them back in

again.”

“We’ll save the sponge bath for tomorrow, nurse.”

Hannibal grimaced at that but said nothing as he sipped more of his tea.

Will peeked one eye open to see the disgruntled look on Hannibal’s face before he chuckled quietly to himself. “I suppose this will give us plenty of time to catch up.”

“It shall.”

“Well, since you know what I’ve been doing then I insist you tell me where you’ve been and what you’ve been doing.”

Hannibal fussed with his mug for a moment before clearing his throat. “The day I left, I took Bedelia to Europe.”

“What.”

Hannibal opened his mouth before closing it again. “I don’t believe that was a question, William.”

Will grimaced as he hid his face behind his mug for a moment. He forced himself to swallow a mouthful of tea before he responded. “You took her with you to Europe,” he prompted

Studying him for a moment, Hannibal noted the way Will looked displeased. “Yes. We traveled to a few countries and stayed at some of my estates.”

“So you took her to Europe and played house.”

“No.”

Will looked over at Hannibal at that. “What?”

“No. We did not ‘play house’. She traveled with me because using the cover that we were retired doctors on a holiday was more believable than a bachelor traveling by himself. Besides a few public events, we did not spend much time together. I left Bedelia at one of my estates in France a couple of years ago. She is no longer staying there. I do not know where she has gone and have not cared to look for her.”

Will contemplated that for a moment before he cleared his throat. “It’s been almost four years since you left.”

“Yes, it has.”

“You didn’t...”

Hannibal took another small sip of his drink before focusing his attention back on Will once more. “I didn’t do a lot of things in that time, Will. What is it that you are asking

about?”

Will finished his tea before handing the cup back to Hannibal. “You didn’t come for me.”

“I wasn’t aware that you wanted me to.”

“I wanted to leave with you that night.”

“You called me.”

“That was when I decided.”

“But I left you.”

Will closed his eyes once more. “Yes. You left me.”

Hannibal set both mugs back onto the tray. He studied Will for a moment before shifting a bit in his chair. “Would you have come with me to Europe and ‘played house’?”

“If you had asked me to.”

Hannibal wasn’t sure what he should say in response to that. “Had I known-“

“We can only move forward, Hannibal. There is no reason to dwell in what could have been. I simply wanted you to know that if you asked, my answer would be the same today as it was then.”

“Then we shall go.”

“Once my gut is healed.”

Hannibal let a small grin rest on his lips. “Yes, once your wound has healed, we will go to Europe together. I have a house that I think you would enjoy.”

“I don’t want to stay somewhere you stayed with Bedelia.”

“While she and I did travel quite a bit, I can assure you that I did not bring her to the estate I’m thinking of.”

“Good.”

Hannibal leaned forward to brush the hair back from Will’s forehead. “You also did not come looking for me, William.”

Will hummed before opening his eyes once more. He made certain to keep his gaze away from Hannibal’s eyes. “They made it quite clear that I was not to leave the country. Or the campus, really. I had to wait for the opportune time to get away.”

“You were very patient then.”

“Yes, well, it wasn’t easy. I haven’t seen my dogs in four years, Hannibal.”

“I’m sorry that they took so much from you because of me, Will.”

“It isn’t your fault. Their actions and mine. They are not your fault. I could have found a time to leave within the last four years.”

Hannibal lifted his gaze to Will’s face once more. “Then why didn’t you?”

“Perhaps for the same reason that you didn’t take me with you that night.”

Hannibal tilted his head in acknowledgment but said no more.

Will yawned again before closing his eyes. “Did you put something in my tea?”

“Just a light sedative to help you sleep. I would rather avoid you feeling any discomfort.”

“I appreciate that. Maybe tell me next time. I’m gonna sleep now.”

Hannibal found himself smiling softly as he helped Will slide down to be more comfortable in the bed. “Of course, William.”

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Will wasn’t aware that he was awake until Hannibal’s voice broke through his panting.

“William?”

Blinking rapidly, Will tore his gaze away from Hannibal’s. “Shit. Fuck. I’m sorry, Hannibal. Are you okay?”

“I should be asking you that. I didn’t mean to startle you. I was just checking to see how your stitches fared through the night.”

“I- I didn’t mean to.”

Hannibal frowned as he searched Will's face for any hints as to what was happening. He looked pale and was sweating. He also looked nervous and anxious. "You didn't mean to grab my arm?"

Will forced his hand to unclench. He released his grip on Hannibal before covering his face with his hands. "I didn't mean to look."

Hannibal felt his frown ease as surprise bubbled forth in his mind. "You didn't mean to look at what?"

Will shuddered. He clenched his eyes shut before shaking his head.

"Is this because of the eye contact? I don't think you were fully awake if that's what you're worried about. We've met eyes before, Will. I know that you don't like it so I try not to make you."

Will pulled his shaking hands away from his face to just stare at his palms. "What are you...? Hannibal?"

"Yes?"

"Did you... Did you feel anything when I looked into your eyes?"

Hannibal felt the corner of his lips tick upward. "Are you asking me for a confession? Do you want me to say something about how my heart flutters in my chest whenever I have the pleasure of getting to looking into your beautiful blue eyes?"

Will grimaced at that. He shook his head before lowering his hands. "Help me sit up."

Hannibal pulled Will up and helped him arrange the pillows before letting him lean back against them. "Can I look at your stitches now?"

"Go ahead," Will sighed.

Hannibal lifted his shirt to look at the neat row of stitches. "It's too bad that I couldn't hide this new scar in your old scar."

"I don't really care about how they look. It doesn't make me uncomfortable to see them."

Sitting back in his chair, Hannibal let his gaze rest on Will's face. "Do you have your words to explain to me what just happened?"

"Open mind?"

Hannibal watched as Will looked at him from the corner of his eye. He smiled and dipped his head. "Always."

Will nodded to himself before focusing on his fingers once more. He twisted them in his lap as he tried to figure out how to say what he needed to say. “Do you remember when we were in Hobbs’ kitchen?”

“Yes.”

“He was standing there holding a knife to Abigail’s throat. He was ready to kill her like he had his wife.”

“Yes, I remember.”

Will closed his eyes for a moment to revisit that memory. “He froze.”

“I had assumed that was because you had a gun trained on him,” Hannibal replied.

Will shook his head as he opened his eyes once more. “It’s because I met his gaze.”

Hannibal felt that curiosity bubble up once more. “You looked into his eyes? What did you see?”

“His soul.”

Hannibal wasn’t sure what to say in reply so he didn’t say anything.

Will let out a frustrated breath before turning to Hannibal once more. “All my life, I have had this curse. If I look into someone’s eyes I can see their soul. Some people have lovely souls. Alana’s is beautiful. It’s all soft colors swirling with light. I can hear music and tinkling bells. She is beautiful through and through.”

Hannibal felt understanding begin to creep upon him. “You can see inside someone when you meet their gaze.”

Will nodded despite the fact that Hannibal hadn’t been asking a question. “It took me some time when I was younger to understand what I was seeing.”

“Your father forbade you to speak of it.”

“He did.”

“Do you not like seeing what truly lies within people?”

Will sucked in another breath before shrugging. “It helps sometimes. I do have empathy to extreme levels, but this helps, too. I can catch glimpses and understand the way people are fundamentally. There are some people that I refuse to look at so that I won’t lose respect for them.”

Hannibal dipped his head in another single nod. “Jack.”

“He’s one. I’ve had other bosses that I didn’t look at.”

“Does seeing what you see affect you at all?”

“No, but I found when I was still young that if I look for too long, the person becomes uncomfortable.”

Hannibal felt one of his eyebrows just raise slightly on his forehead. “What happened?”

“I was playing with some neighborhood kids. We were having a staring contest. The other kid started crying and then screaming. He couldn’t look away from my gaze. One of the other kids shoved me to get to him and broke our eye contact.”

Hannibal found that he was slightly leaning closer to the bed but didn’t stop himself or straighten up. “Was there any lasting damage?”

Will shook his head but didn’t lose his frown. “We moved shortly after that happened. I tried to look him up when I was older and had understood what had happened but couldn’t find anything.”

“So when you met Hobbs’ gaze in that kitchen, you saw his soul and made him freeze.”

“Yes.”

Hannibal had to forcefully make himself stay in his seat. “What did it look like?”

“Diseased. He was rotting from the inside out. He was putrid and the smell was atrocious. I was actually surprised that I didn’t start gagging.”

Hannibal licked his lips as he shifted his weight. “Can you tell me, Will? What does mine look like?”

Will stared down at his fingers for another moment. “You have to understand, Hannibal. I didn’t look. I didn’t know. I didn’t want my opinion of you to change because of what I saw in your eyes. I didn’t understand until that day in your kitchen.”

Reminding himself to stay calm, Hannibal leaned forward to take one of Will’s hands into his. “What didn’t you understand?”

“I had thought that the dreams I had been having were from the encephalitis. I thought my mind had taken the vision from a dark place in my mind. I didn’t realize what it was. Who it was.”

“Tell me,” Hannibal breathed.

Will lifted his gaze until he met Hannibal’s. “There are beautiful souls and ugly souls. Yours, Hannibal, is something different. Yours is transcendent. I see you. I *see* you. You are beautiful if beautiful could even begin to describe what I see. You stand as you do but with ebony skin of something stronger than what makes up mere humans. You have skin but it is like polished stone. There is a rack of antlers that rises from your brow. It is a proud

crown. A glorious crown. Your fingers end in sharp claws that would rend your enemies to pieces. You are the most magnificent soul I have ever seen.”

Hannibal didn’t breathe as Will described him. He held his gaze but felt no stirrings of unease that Will claimed he caused. “Will.”

Looking down at their clasped hands, Will shuddered once more. He’d seen Hannibal’s gaze for the first time that night so long ago. He’d seen it and understood that he’d made a grave mistake in thinking that anyone could cage Hannibal. He was truly a free and wild spirit. “I saw you for the first time that night. You slid your blade into my gut and opened my eyes.”

Squeezing the hand within his, Hannibal pulled Will’s gaze back to his. “When I look into your eyes I do not feel any of the discomfort that you describe.”

“Does that mean you don’t believe me?”

“I do not doubt you, William. There is truth in your gaze and in your words. You can see what you claim. I do not doubt that. I am simply letting you know that you can meet my gaze without fear. I do not know why this doesn’t seem to affect me like it has others, but I am looking into your eyes right now and feel what I have always felt.”

Will blinked before focusing back on what Hannibal said. “What do you always feel?”

“I thought you said that you weren’t asking for a confession?”

Will made to pull his hand out of Hannibal’s but couldn’t. He tried not to let his smile show on his face when Hannibal didn’t let go of his hand. “If you don’t want to tell me then you simply have to say so.”

Hannibal pulled Will’s hand to his lips before pressing a kiss to his knuckles. “From the moment you walked into Jack’s office, I have been captivated by you. When I look at you, when I meet your gaze, I feel something I haven’t felt for a very long time.”

Keeping his gaze locked with Hannibal’s, Will shuddered again but for an entirely different reason. “What’s that?”

“Hope. I feel hope that for the first time since my family was taken from me that I won’t be alone.”

“Hannibal.”

“You have to understand, Will. There are those I allow into my life to see pieces of me. There is no one that I have met that I thought could see all of me. No one until you.”

“You love me.”

“Yes.”

“I love you.”

Hannibal pressed another kiss to Will's hand. “I have spent these years thinking about the things that I could have done differently. I wanted to bind you to me, Will. I wanted to make it so that you would feel as lost and bereft without me as I did without you.”

Will sniffled as he turned his head away from Hannibal's gaze. It was too much. Too much to see and hear and feel all at the same time. “I do. I do feel lost when you aren't there. I felt like I was in a daze. I walked around campus in a fog. I let them take my house and dogs because without you there was no point in life.”

Hannibal moved until he was sitting on the bed with Will's head cradled in his hands. “I would make it so that we will never be apart again. I would have you with me always, Will.”

Will laughed through his tears. “I feel like this is a marriage proposal.”

“It can be if that is what you want.”

Will stilled. He allowed Hannibal to pull his gaze back to his face. “You're serious?”

“I would have to call in a couple of favors from people that don't know that I'm being hunted by the FBI, but I'm certain I could procure a marriage license for us.”

“Hannibal.”

“Yes, Will?”

“I really need you to kiss me now.”

Hannibal leaned forward while being careful of Will's stomach wound. He pressed their lips together in a chaste kiss before attempting to lean back once more.

Will made a sound in his throat before digging his fingers into Hannibal's hair to hold him right where he wanted him as he pressed into the kiss. Will took advantage of the gasp Hannibal let out to lick into his mouth and deepen the kiss further. He wanted to pull Hannibal down on top of him to feel his weight, but the larger man would not move.

Hannibal gentled Will's hands before gentling his kiss. He indulged Will with several kisses before finally finding the ability to sit up once more. “Darling, I would love to continue to kiss you.”

“So please do.”

Hannibal had to stop himself from leaning in to taste Will's kiss bitten lips once more. “I am afraid that my control is fraying.”

Will smirked at that. “What are you admitting to, Hannibal?”

“If I continue to kiss you I cannot guarantee that it will remain with just kissing. I’m afraid that I have, as you would say, shot myself in the foot. I made the incision on your stomach bigger and therefore have stopped myself from being able to ravish you.”

Will blinked a few times until he chuckled. “That was a lot of words to admit that you cock blocked yourself.”

Hannibal grimaced but nodded. “Crude but accurate. I did indeed do that.”

Will shrugged as he continued to smile. “It will heal.”

“Yes?”

Will pulled Hannibal’s hand to his lips and pressed a kiss to his knuckles like Hannibal had done to him. “Then we have time to explore that part of our relationship later.”

Hannibal barely realized he was nodding his head. “I look forward to it.”

Will grinned again before dropping their hands back to his lap. “The estate you want to take me to.”

“What about it?”

“Is it secluded?”

Hannibal swallowed as he nodded. “Yes.”

“Ask me why, Hannibal,” Will purred.

“Why?”

“Because I have the feeling that I won’t want to wear much for clothing once we’re there, but I would hate to have neighbors looking at me.”

Hannibal leaned forward to crush Will’s lips to his own. “I would not share that vision with anyone. Your beauty is for me, William. I would have you naked and lounging wherever you wished, but it would be only my eyes that would gaze upon you. I would draw you. I would paint you. I would lavish you with any and all attention you could ever desire.”

“You would paint me?”

“A mere photo would never capture your true beauty, Will. There is no photographer on this planet that would be able to put on film just how amazingly beautiful you are.”

Will felt something click in his mind. He felt his gaze sharpen as he met Hannibal’s once more. The creature that was his dark, beautiful soul stared back out at him. “I know how he’s doing it.”

Hannibal sat back as he watched the change come over his Will. “Explain.”

Will winced as he saw the way that Hannibal's face hardened, even if it was just barely. "The killer. I know how he is picking the families."

Hannibal reached out with the hand that wasn't holding Will's to cup the side of his face. "Your brain will never cease to amaze me. How is he doing it?"

"It's something to do with the photos. The first family had a new photo of their family in the parent's bedroom. There were markings on the wall that showed that the picture had been recently changed but they hadn't repainted the wall yet."

"And the second house?"

"There were the same type of photos in the hall near the living room. It looked like it had just been done. They would have just painted and arranged everything. It was a recent photo of a beach trip."

Hannibal returned Will's smile, unable to help but feel the same small joy that he did at figuring out another piece of the puzzle. "What are you going to do with this information?"

Will frowned at that. He looked back down at their joined hands. "I don't want him to kill another family. He picks one with several kids. He kills them and then lines them up along the wall of the parent's bedroom."

"He's defiling the mother."

Nodding, Will ran his fingers over Hannibal's knuckles. "He's been putting shards of mirrors into their eyes. He wants to see himself as he kills them and rapes the mother. He wants to watch his transformation. He doesn't want to miss a moment of it."

"What do you think will make him transform?"

Will shook his head. "Whatever it is, it isn't this. He's going to escalate if he isn't caught. The mirrors aren't showing him anything but himself. He can't see what he's looking for in them."

Hannibal shifted his grip to squeeze Will's hand once more. "What do you see, Will, when you look into a mirror?"

Stilling, Will took a moment to breathe in slowly through his nose. "I have not looked into my eyes in a very long time."

"You choose to avoid people's eyes when you are afraid you will lose respect for them if you see."

"Yes."

"I do not think you should be afraid to meet your own gaze, William."

Will squeezed Hannibal's hand once more before letting it go. "Help me to stand,

Hannibal.”

“I didn’t mean to imply that you should go look immediately.”

Laughing, Will shook his head. “No, I am not going to go look at my soul. I’m going to slowly walk to the bathroom so I can use it. I’ll save soul gazing for another day.”

Hannibal tilted his head in a nod before rising to help Will to his feet. “When you have made a decision, will you let me know?”

“About looking at my soul or with what to do with the information on the killer?”

“Both.”

“You will be the first person I tell on both accounts then. Now let me go so I can save some dignity today.”

Hannibal kissed the side of Will’s head before backing out of the bathroom. He returned to the bedroom to fluff Will’s pillows and pull out a set of clean clothes. He turned to watch as Will shuffled out of the bathroom. “Is it hurting?”

“No, I just don’t like the way the stitches feel when they pull. I’m not in any pain.”

“Good. Let me know if that changes.”

Will agreed as Hannibal helped him change his shirt and pants and then helped him back into the bed. “I’ll be smelling ripe tomorrow.”

“You will not yet be able to stand under the spray of the shower but I can help you bathe.”

Relaxing back into his pillows, Will nodded. “We’ll worry about that tomorrow. For now, do you have anything for me to eat? I feel ready to eat.”

Hannibal made certain that Will was comfortable before he rose from the bed. “I will go make you something light yet filling. Is there anything you have a particular craving for?”

Will yawned as he let his eyes drift closed. “No, anything you make me will be delicious.”

Hannibal felt his spine straighten and his chest puff out just slightly. No other human had ever had the effect on him that Will did. He was starting to realize that he preferred it that way. “I won’t be gone long. Just rest.”

Will smiled to himself as his eyes slipped shut. They had a lot to still talk about and decisions needed to be made, but Will couldn’t deny that he was happy for the first time in four years.

XXX

“Is there a way for me to contact someone from the team without them being able to track me?”

Hannibal lowered the book he’d been reading to look over at Will. They’d started sharing the master bedroom after the second night when Will had to yell for Hannibal to come help him to the bathroom in the middle of the night. Hannibal found that he much preferred their current arrangement to their old one. “To tell them about the photos?”

“Yes, among other things.”

“What are you thinking?”

Will bit at his lip before taking a steadying breath. Hannibal knew him. Hannibal would not judge him for any decision that he made. “I would like to show you.”

“Show me what?”

“What happens when someone looks into my eyes. Someone that isn’t you. I want you to see so you understand why it was that I was so worried.”

Hannibal frowned at that before marking his page in his book and setting it to the side. “I believe you, Will. I do not need some sort of proof.”

Reaching over, Will placed his hand on top of the one on the thigh closest to him. “That’s not why I want to show you. I want you to see me and understand me like I see and understand you.”

Hannibal cocked his head to one side as he studied Will. He hadn’t thought of it like that, but now that Will had put that thought into his head he wanted to see it. “You said that it torments the people you look at.”

“Yes.”

“I do not think you would be willing to have me bring just anyone to the house.”

Will moved his fingers so that they linked under Hannibal’s. “I’m not.”

“You want him. The killer.”

“He makes them suffer. Why can’t I make him suffer?”

Hannibal breathed in sharply and deeply before reminding himself that he cannot yet touch Will the way that he wants to. “You want to see how far you can go. You want to see what will happen if you stare until they stop screaming.”

Will forced himself to look away from Hannibal. “Yes. I want that. I want to know this part of me that I have kept at bay for so long.”

Hannibal moved until he was straddling Will’s lap. He made Will look up at him by fisting his hand in his curls and tilting his head. “I would be there by your side as you learned about yourself. I would see you as you came into your own.”

“I wouldn’t do it without you.”

Hannibal crushed their mouths together without putting any pressure on Will’s wound. He tried to hold himself back. He tried to keep his desires contained, but Will kissed him back with equal passion and Hannibal felt as though he was drowning in it.

He hadn’t realized he was shifting forward until Will let out a pained sound.

Hannibal wrenched himself backward and off of Will’s lap before he could do any more damage. He stood and paced the room for a few moments while ignoring the way Will’s breaths seemed to match his. “When you are healed, William.”

“Yes,” Will groaned. “Tell me.”

“I will pin you to this bed and make you let loose those sounds because it will be my teeth marking your flesh. I will brand you as mine. I will leave permanent marks where everyone will be able to see. They will know that the most they will ever be able to do again is look. I will give you so much pleasure that you will stay in bed for days, not because of an injury but because you will be too exhausted to leave it.”

Will moaned as he leaned back against his pillows. He slid his hand down his chest to the band of his pants but no further. “Hannibal. Stop. You have to stop. I cannot make a mess of my bandages.”

Hannibal sucked in another deep breath before stepping back toward the bed. “I rarely allow for my passions to control me like this, William.”

“Hannibal.”

“You will listen to me. If there is ever anything that I do that you do not like, you will tell me. I would not hurt you. Not in that way. Not ever.”

Will nodded before lifting one of his hands for Hannibal to take. “Come back into the bed and hold me.”

“I’m afraid I am still a tad worked up.”

Will chuckled as he pulled on Hannibal's hand once more. "I don't care that you have an erection. Come here."

Hannibal allowed himself to be pulled back into the bed. He made sure to keep his hips away from Will as he pulled the other man into his embrace. "If we are able to find this killer, you would hunt him with me?"

Will hummed as he ran his fingers through Hannibal's hair. "I've always been more of a fisherman than a hunter, but I would help you in whatever way I was able."

Hannibal made a sound at that. "It would not be difficult to lure him in if we could find him. We do have, after all, the one thing that he wants."

"What's that?" Will asked sleepily.

"Someone who can truly see him."

XXX

"Are you sure this is going to work?"

Hannibal maintained his cool façade as he looked into Will's worried gaze. "I have eluded the FBI, the CIA, the NSA, and many other governmental agencies with acronyms across the world. I can assure you that they won't be able to trace this call or return it, for that matter."

Will let out another breath before nodding at Hannibal. "All right. Do you remember the plan?"

Hannibal indulged Will with the tilt of his head in a nod.

Will scowled at him before turning his back on Hannibal. "Don't act all smug because I'm nervous and you have your emotions on lockdown. I can still read you like a book, Doctor Lecter. I know you now."

Hannibal took the moment before Will dialed to walk up behind him unnoticed. He wrapped his arms around Will's waist, mindful of the still-healing stomach wound, before pressing kisses to the back of his neck. He let his breath ghost across Will's ear and smiled

sharply at the shudder it caused to roll down Will's spine. "I would never have you blind to me again, darling."

Enjoying the embrace for a moment, Will forced himself to step away. "None of that or our plan will fail before it begins."

Hannibal took a step back before he turned to sit back in his seat at the table. In order for their plan to work, he needed to be silent unless Will indicated otherwise.

Taking one last deep breath, Will lifted the cellphone and typed in Jack's number. It rang twice before it was answered.

"Crawford."

Will smirked at the grunted way Jack spoke before he schooled his face. "Jack?"

The silence over the line was deafening.

"Will?"

Glad that he still sounded enough like himself that he didn't have to explain who was calling, Will swallowed before making his voice sound small. "Jack, he found me."

"Who? Lecter? Are you with Hannibal Lecter?"

Will could hear the sounds of people near Jack freeze. Wherever he was, it was somewhere with other agents. They were all listening in now. "He took me outside the airport. He'd been waiting for the chance."

"Did you speak with him?"

Something or someone smacked something or someone. Will had to stop himself from smiling. He couldn't let his mirth show through his voice. They had to be convinced that he was frightened. But someone listening definitely didn't like that Jack wasn't asking about Will's safety first. Not that Will had expected him to.

"I mean, are you safe? Did you get away?"

Will did laugh at that. It was a stilted ugly thing that was mostly a sob. "Get away? You think I can escape him?"

Will met Hannibal's eyes and then forced himself to look away. The possessive look in them would not help him stay in character for this phone call.

"Do you know where you are?"

"That's not important right now. Jack, I figured it out. He develops photos. He's choosing the families from their photos. Find the company that developed them. Find the man that handled them and you'll find the killer."

“You’re sure about this?”

“There’s only one week before he kills again, Jack. You have to act quickly.”

“Figure out where you are, Will. Call me back when you have the chance and we’ll come get you.”

Will winced and then let out a shuddered breath. He held the phone down to his shoulder as he moved a couple of paces closer to Hannibal. “Hannibal! I... It’s not what it-“

Knowing his lines perfectly, Hannibal let his malice leak into his voice. “You took my phone and called someone without permission, William. That was very rude of you. What is to be done about that?”

Will smiled as Hannibal took the phone from his hand and hung it up without bothering to listen to the threats being bellowed into by Jack. He slid into Hannibal’s lap and kissed him before pulling away from him once more. “Do you think they’ll do it?”

Hannibal traced the worried lines on Will’s face with one of his fingers before pulling him back into a kiss. “Jack is trained to believe your insights. He’s going to have people look into it. They’re desperate and he thinks you just did something ridiculously dangerous to get that information to him. He’ll know it was important.”

Smiling, Will closed the distance between them for one last kiss before he stood up. “The people you have in place will let us know as soon as they figure it out, right? I don’t want him to slip through our fingers.”

“We will know as soon as the FBI knows. We’ll be able to lay our trap before they get to him.”

“Good. Now, let’s go upstairs and play doctor.”

Hannibal grimaced as Will laughed. “I don’t like it when you refer to my checking your stitches in that way. Especially since I cannot touch you in the way that phrase implies.”

Will smirked at him over his shoulder. “Not yet you can’t. Come take care of me so I heal faster.”

Hannibal was powerless to do anything but follow Will up the stairs.

XXX

“They have him.”

“They have him or they *have* him?”

Hannibal sighed as he looked up from his tablet. “They have discovered that he works for a photo and film processing plant in South Carolina where both families, and most likely many others, have had their films or photos processed. His name is Francis Dolarhyde. The FBI is on its way to his home to speak with him.”

Will smiled as he moved around to stand before Hannibal. He took the tablet from his hands without looking at it before setting it aside. “Do we have time?”

“Only a few minutes.”

“Good,” Will said before he leaned down to press a hard kiss to Hannibal’s lips. “I want you to make the call. I want to watch you do it this time. Since I didn’t get to see it when you talked to Hobbs.”

Hannibal blinked up at Will before a small smile lifted his lips. “You knew.”

“I suspected. Now I know.”

Hannibal chuckled at that before removing himself from Will’s arms. He did not want to go, but he knew this was too important for him to be distracted. Even if that distraction was William.

Crossing to the table, Hannibal picked up his phone before dialing the number he’d memorized. It rang several times before someone answer it with a grunt. “Mr. Dolarhyde.”

“*Who is this?*”

“You don’t know me but I’m a fan of your work.”

“*My work?*”

“Yes. You are becoming, Mr. Dolarhyde. You are becoming something more than a man. I want to see you transform.”

“*Who is this?*”

“They know.”

“*What?*”

“The FBI. They know who you are. Who you were. They’re coming for you. You have an hour at most before they are at your house.”

“What do you want?”

“To see you become. I can give you an address. It’s a safe place for us to meet up.”

“What makes you think that I would trust you?”

“You and I are alike, Mr. Dolarhyde. We were both born men. I have already transformed. It would be a pity if you were not able to do so as well.”

“No.”

“I have something you don’t have, Mr. Dolarhyde. I know why it is that you haven’t been able to complete your transformation. They can’t see you.”

“And you can?”

“No, but I have someone that can. Tell me, what do you know of Will Graham?”

Hannibal’s smirk had Will feeling weak in the knees. He sat down on the couch and just listened as Hannibal easily cast the line and hooked their fish. Now they just needed to reel him in.

XXX

The little house on the cliff was perfect. Will stood outside and watched the waves roll in from the ocean. It was secluded and lovely. Will was almost sad that they wouldn’t be able to spend more time there.

“William?”

Turning, Will smiled at Hannibal. “I’m enjoying the ocean. Probably a good thing you didn’t have that driver bring me here. I wouldn’t have listened to a word you said. I would have been too distracted.”

Hannibal allowed his mirth to show as he stepped out the doors. “I’m glad that you’re enjoying it. I had thought about bringing you here but ultimately decided against it.”

“You didn’t want me to feel trapped.”

It wasn't a question but Hannibal dipped his head in answer anyhow. "I was unsure of how you felt about me and thought it best to not make it worse with environmental barriers."

Will couldn't help but laugh at that. "So you took me to an equally secluded cabin in the woods? That's not very logical."

"I thought that since your previous house was near the woods, you would feel more at ease there."

Will smiled as he crossed the small yard to take Hannibal's hand in his. He brought the other man's arm up until it was draped over him as Will turned so his back pressed against Hannibal's chest. He looked out over the ocean as Hannibal tightened the hold he'd been put into. "I appreciate the thought."

Hannibal nuzzled his face against Will's neck before bringing his other hand up to sit against the front of Will's throat. "I find that all I want to do is make you comfortable."

"I am when I'm with you."

Placing light kisses along the nape of Will's neck, Hannibal hummed in response before pulling himself away. "Come along, William. There is much to do before our guest arrives."

Smiling, Will allowed Hannibal to pull him into the house. They weren't certain when Francis would arrive, but they would be prepared as soon as possible for him. "Do you suspect he'll try anything?"

"I suspect he'll try all manners of things. I doubt we have anything to fear from him. I told him you would be able to help him become. I am certain that he'll be willing to prostrate himself at your feet if you asked him to."

"Would you?"

Hannibal turned and caught the desire in Will's gaze. "If you asked it of me."

Will licked his lips as he thought about it. The Chesapeake Ripper at his beck and call. Hannibal willing to serve him however he wished. "I might ask for that once we've reached Europe."

Hannibal tipped his head before he turned away. He took a breath before focusing on the task at hand. "There are cameras and alarms set up throughout the roads and forests surrounding the house. As long as he doesn't climb the cliff, we'll know he's coming. I would like to check your stomach before he arrives."

Will smiled at that before lifting his shirt up and over his head. He peeled off the bandages that Hannibal had placed on him earlier that morning before he moved to stand before the doctor. "Healing up nicely, I think. I should probably thank my doctor for that."

Humming, Hannibal ducked his head to prod at Will's wound. "If you do not tear your stitches tonight then I think they'll be fine to come out tomorrow."

"Are you releasing me for more strenuous activities?"

Hannibal lifted his gaze to Will's. He still felt a thrill every time he met Will's eyes. "I'll remove the stitches and see how you can move before making that decision."

Smiling, Will reached up to bring Hannibal's head down to brush kisses against his lips. "I appreciate you being careful with my health."

Hannibal pulled back slightly to look down into Will's eyes once more. "I did you a disservice by not telling you about your encephalitis. I would not make that same mistake again."

Will lifted himself onto his toes to press another firm kiss to Hannibal's lips before he stepped back out of his arms. "I know you wouldn't. Please bandage me so that we can eat something before our guest arrives."

Hannibal moved to do as Will asked. "Something light will do. We do not want to be feeling heavy or sluggish this evening."

Will made a sound in agreement as Hannibal taped the gauze back over his wound. Once he was finished, Will retrieved his shirt and slid it back over his head. He was glad to find that the movements no longer caused him any discomfort.

Leaving Hannibal in the kitchen, Will retreated to the computer sitting on the small table in the den. He scanned the screen and the various cameras for any sign of movement. Hannibal really did have most of the forest under surveillance. Not that that would do much good if a SWAT team came for them.

The cameras showed empty roads and swaying trees and the wind moved through their branches. He noted a few animals still moving around but nothing else. Their guest had not yet arrived.

Looking up, Will smiled as Hannibal carried in two plates with finger sandwiches on them. "Did you make us snack food?"

Hannibal set one plate next to Will before sitting in the other chair with his own. "I thought it would be better to have something easy to eat than something that would require more clean up."

"It was a good idea. Thank you."

Hannibal leaned over to place a kiss on Will's cheek before he began to eat his sandwiches. He was content to sit there in silence with his companion while they watched the computer screen. Hannibal couldn't remember a time he'd felt so at peace.

A car moving slowly down the road caused a tiny beeping noise to emit from the computer. Will leaned forward to better see the vehicle. He clicked on the small camera feed

to have it fill the screen. “This looks promising.”

Hannibal noted that the man was alone in his car. He seemed to be driving slowly in order to find a turn that could be difficult to see. It was more than likely that this was their guest. “When he gets here, I’ll bring him into the living room. I think you should be seated in the large chair. I’ll stand beside you. I doubt we’ll have any trouble with him but I’d rather not take any chances. I don’t want him to learn that you are injured.”

“Injured or not, I am able to defend myself if he attacks.”

Dipping his head, Hannibal set his plate onto Will’s empty one before he stood. “I have no doubt of that, William. I simply do not want to stitch you closed again.”

Will closed his eyes as Hannibal pressed a kiss to his forehead. “I’ll let you know when he makes the turn to head up the drive.”

Hannibal left Will in front of the computer to return to the kitchen. He cleaned their few dishes and returned them to their places in the cupboards. He was going to miss this small house of the cliffs. Though it would be worth the loss of it to see Will use his gift.

“Here he comes, Hannibal.”

Pulling himself out of his thoughts, Hannibal moved to the front door of their little house. He stood off to the side so that he would still have to approach when Francis knocked. It wouldn’t do to seem too eager.

Hannibal counted to twenty before he stepped forward to open the door after the knock finally came. He met the hard, cold gaze of Francis Dolarhyde but was undisturbed by the man. He may have murdered two families but Hannibal had eaten hundreds. “Mr. Dolarhyde?”

“Yes.”

The slight lisp wasn’t expected but it made sense. The man was definitely overcompensating for something. “Please, come in. We’ve been expecting you.”

Hannibal stepped to the side and watched as Dolarhyde entered the house. He was tense with one hand in his pocket. There was no doubt in Hannibal’s mind that he was gripping some sort of weapon. Still, he let the man look around the entrance while he closed the door. He did not lock it. There was no point in doing so. They’d already caught their prey.

Stepping back into Dolarhyde’s line of sight, Hannibal gestured for the man to follow him. “This way, please. Will is waiting for us.”

“You’re certain that he can help me?”

“He will definitely be able to do something for you.”

Hannibal led Dolarhyde down a short hall to where Will was seated in the living room. He’d followed Hannibal’s suggestion for him to sit in the large chair. As they

discussed, Hannibal took up his spot at Will's side. "William, this is Francis Dolarhyde. Francis, Will Graham."

Will dipped his head in a cold greeting. He watched as Francis kept one hand in his pocket while he moved closer to where Will was sitting. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that their guest had a knife clenched in his fist. "Francis, I've been eager to meet you."

"Why?"

Despite his gruff way of speaking, Will knew that Francis was frightened. The man had walked into the lion's den and was only just starting to realize it. "I saw your work."

"You work for the FBI."

"I did."

"You left them?"

"I felt a little cooped up. So I left them to find Hannibal. He's magnificent, isn't he? Do you know what he is, Francis?"

Dolarhyde slid his gaze from Will to Hannibal. It was clear that he was sizing the other man up and found him wanting. "Looks like just another rich man."

Will didn't bother to bite back his smirk. He let his gaze drift across Francis' cheeks but did not yet look into his eyes. "Ah, yes. Hannibal has quite the disguise. He has learned that in order to hunt as he wishes, he must keep his prey unaware."

"You hunt?"

Hannibal kept his posture relaxed but straight. He did not respond to Dolarhyde's question.

Blinking, Will turned to look up at Hannibal. "He's a wendigo, Francis. Do you know what that means?"

Slowly, the other man nodded. "Yes, I understand."

"What I want to know," Will said as he leaned slightly forward in his chair, "is what you are becoming."

Francis frowned at that. "You can't tell already?"

"Come sit in front of me and let me look into your eyes."

Slowly, with his hand still in his pocket, Francis moved to sit. He let his gaze flicker back to Hannibal but looked back at Will when the other man, no, the wendigo didn't move. "What will you see?"

Will smiled before finally lifting his gaze away from the other man's nose. "Your soul."

Francis felt everything freeze. He felt as though every muscle in his body was no longer under his control. He could not move his eyes away from Will Graham's gaze. He was trapped.

"What do you see?"

Breathing in slowly, Will let his gaze wander over the soul of the man before him. "His soul is twisted. It is rotting and yet, it is becoming something new. He has wings. They are giant leathery scraps but they are wings. He believes himself to be a dragon."

Hannibal watched as Dolarhyde began sweating. It was clear that he could not look into Will's eyes the way that Hannibal could. "A dragon."

Will blinked and looked away from Francis to Hannibal. "The newspapers started calling him the Tooth Fairy. Odd, they were right about the wings."

"But they had the wrong mythological creature."

Will hummed at that. Neither of them paid any attention to the way Francis was panting in the chair he'd sat down into. "I cannot tell if his soul will heal the rot when he transforms or if he was a dragon and now he is rotting."

The man's whimper caused Hannibal to look over at him. "I know which one he would prefer."

Will looked back over at Dolarhyde, as well. "Am I correct, Francis? Are you a dragon?"

Francis had to visibly calm himself down before he could respond. "I am. The Great Red Dragon."

Smiling, Will nodded before looking back at Hannibal. "Did you notice?"

Hannibal dipped his head without looking away from Francis. "Yes. Do you wish to continue?"

Will felt his grin turn sharper. "I want you to see."

Hannibal didn't respond. He simply waited for Will to continue on with his plans.

Francis looked from one man to the other before settling his eyes on Will. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to fix your soul, Francis. You are something in between what you should be. I'm going to look inside of you and fix it. Will you let me?"

"You can make me be what I am supposed to be?"

“Yes.”

Francis moved to the edge of the chair he was sitting on. “Please. I want to become.”

Will forced himself to stay calm where he was sitting. “It will hurt.”

“I am already aching.”

Hannibal had been right. The man would do anything Will asked him to. “Then you must simply let me look. Sit there, Francis. Keep your eyes open and on me.”

Francis nodded a few times before moving even closer. He locked his gaze onto Will’s eyes even though Will wasn’t looking back at him. “I won’t blink.”

“No,” Will said as he lifted his gaze once more. “But you will scream.”

Francis felt everything within him freeze once more. He felt the touch of something deep inside of him that he’d always known was wrong somehow. The touch at first was a caress. Then it became something more. Something painful.

Will had never tried to do anything to the souls he saw. He knew that looking for too long would do something, but he hadn’t understood what. The longer he sat there and looked at Francis’ soul, the more he understood. It wasn’t that he could just see them. It was that he could manipulate them. There was no reaching out with some sort of power from himself. He did not use his own soul to rend theirs. He simply looked into their eyes and watched as his presence there became too much.

Hannibal watched as Francis slowly began shaking. It was clear that the man that thought himself a dragon would not be able to escape Will’s hold on him. His body was trying, but it would not succeed.

It started with small tremors through his lesser muscles. Then it became shakes as he sweated through his shirt. Small whimpers left his mouth for a long time before they changed into something longer and more powerful. William had been right. He would scream.

The blood coming out of his ears was different. Hannibal had not been expecting that. It implied that something was happening to Dolarhyde’s brain. “What are you doing to him, William?”

“I am watching as his soul rips itself apart.”

“Then he is unworthy of your gaze.”

Will hummed as he continued to watch as bits and pieces of the dragon’s soul were torn off. They fluttered into nothing. He would never be whole again. Will could stop looking now and Francis would be demented. He would have to be committed. The BSHCI would surely welcome him with open arms.

“They say, William, that the eyes are the windows to the soul.”

“They do, don’t they?” Will replied. He knew now that he wouldn’t be able to look away. He was too enthralled with watching Dolarhyde’s soul shred itself. He would watch until there was nothing left. “What does that make mine?”

Hannibal lifted his hand to rest it in Will’s curls without breaking the eye contact that Will was keeping with their guest. “I would liken your eyes to more of an observatory. One that has been shuttered for too long. I believe it is time for you to open them and see.”

Will watched with rapt attention as the last bit of Dolarhyde’s soul disappeared. There was nothing there for him to see. The man was empty. “Check to see if he is still alive. I see nothing inside of him now.”

Hannibal moved forward to place his hand against Francis’ neck. There was a weak pulse thrumming through his body. “He lives.”

“Francis?”

There was no response.

Reaching out, Hannibal tapped the man’s cheek. He did not flinch nor move on his own. “I do believe he is a vegetable.”

“Stand up.”

Francis did, but it was like his body could no longer remember the correct way to move. Every muscle flexed and moved, but it was stilted and jerky. Still, he got to his feet.

“It seems, William, that you can control him.”

“Tell him to do something, Hannibal.”

Hannibal stepped back to look at the swaying shell of a man before them. “Sit down, Francis.”

He did not obey.

Slowly, Will got to his feet. He felt slightly dizzy but otherwise no different. “What shall I do with him? We know now, what my gaze can do. What shall I do with this pathetic body that’s left?”

Hannibal shifted until he could wrap his arms around Will from behind. He tucked his nose against the side of Will’s head and breathed him in for a moment. “He did want to become a dragon.”

“Yes,” Will said with a smile. “I’ll make him fly. Come along, Francis.”

The body was awkward as it followed Will and Hannibal out of the house. The sun was beginning to set back behind the house, leaving the coast in shadows.

“I thought to leave him here for Jack to find, but I like the idea of him taking flight.”

Hannibal placed a kiss against Will’s head as they watched the body sway in the wind. “There are rocks down at the bottom. He may end up there for Jack to find.”

Will turned to kiss Hannibal’s lips before he stepped out of the other man’s embrace. “Come here, Francis.”

Not liking Will being so close to the edge even if he was standing next to a man he completely controlled, Hannibal took a step forward. “Be careful, William. I do not wish to see you upon those same rocks.”

Shooting a smile at Hannibal over his shoulder, Will stepped up beside Francis. “You are a dragon now, Francis. Lift your arms and spread your wings. That’s it. Good boy. Step to the edge and take flight.”

He did not fly. The body of Francis Dolarhyde fell. It tumbled over the edge of the cliff into the swirling waters of the ocean below. Will watched as it was tossed about in the waves before it hit a rock and drifted under. It did not come back up to the surface.

“I suppose I’ll have to call Jack and let him know that the dragon has been slain.”

Hannibal smiled as Will made his way back into his arms. “And what will you tell him of your wendigo?”

Will lifted himself to connect his lips with Hannibal’s. “I don’t believe it is any of his business what I do with the things that are mine.”

Hannibal’s answering smile was beautiful.

XXX

“Jack, can you hear me?”

“Will, what is that noise? Where are you?”

Will ran a hand through his hair, he ignored Hannibal sitting at the counter behind him. "I'm in a house on the edge of a cliff. You can hear the ocean."

"Are you with Hannibal?"

"He's not here right now. Dolarhyde showed up."

"What? Will, how do you know that name? What do you mean he showed up?"

Forcing himself to not smile, Will rolled his eyes as he started to pace. "Somehow, Hannibal was able to contact him. I don't understand how. He brought Dolarhyde here."

"Where is he now?"

"He... He fell, Jack. He fell over the side of the cliff and into the ocean. He hit a rock."

"Fuck. We're going to have to look for the body."

Will nodded at that. "It wasn't pretty."

Hannibal tilted his head at that. Will was right. It wasn't pretty. It was something more. It was beyond mere flattering words.

"Where is Hannibal now, Will?"

"I don't know. I don't know if he's coming back. He left."

"What do you mean he left? Why would he take you and then leave you?"

Will shrugged despite Jack not being able to see him. "I don't know, Jack. He brought Dolarhyde here. He wanted me to help him kill him. He wanted me to see how beautiful we could be together."

"Did you?"

"Did I what?" Will whispered.

"Did you kill him?"

Will blinked at that. Jack sounded oddly furious. For one moment, Will wanted to confess. "No. I didn't kill him. He jumped."

"You said that he fell."

"He was trying to become a dragon, Jack. I told you that he was trying to transform into something else. The man thought he was a dragon. Hannibal told him to fly. He didn't."

"Fuck."

Will nodded in agreement at that. "I don't know how much time I have. Hannibal could come back at any moment. You have to come get me, Jack. You promised you'd protect me."

"You told me that I couldn't promise you anything."

Will sucked in a breath before looking over at Hannibal. He wasn't sure what his face was doing but Hannibal's was deadly. "Jack."

"Give me an address or something. I'll send in the cavalry."

Will said it while his eyes remained on Hannibal. He didn't want to be saved. He didn't want Jack to come and take him from Hannibal. But he had wanted Jack to want to. It hurt to understand that he was nothing to him.

"Shit, that's a long way away. We'll get there as soon as possible. If Hannibal comes back then stall him."

Will didn't say anything as he ended the call. He let the phone fall from his fingers without looking away from Hannibal's eyes. "Hannibal."

Rising from his chair, Hannibal stalked across the kitchen until he could pull Will into his arms. "I will always fight for you. I will always rescue you when you need me to. I will stand by your side. My loyalty to you will never falter."

Will squeezed his eyes shut as he pressed his face into Hannibal's chest. "I want to go back to the cabin. I want to go with you to Europe."

"I would serve you his heart on a golden platter if you asked."

"I want no piece of Jack Crawford in my life ever again."

Hannibal's smile was vicious as he held Will to him. "Then I shall make certain that you never have to lay eyes on him again."

Shuddering, Will tucked himself closer to Hannibal. "Take me away from here and make good on your promises. I want these stitches out as quickly as possible."

Doing as he was bid, Hannibal pulled Will with him to the front door. He helped him into their car before he returned to the house for his phone and his laptop. There was nothing else there he would bring with them. The FBI was sure to scour the place when they arrived, but there would be nothing there that would lead them to Hannibal and Will.

Taking Will's hand into his, Hannibal pulled out of the driveway and made his way back down the coast. If Will wanted to return to their quiet cabin in the woods then that is where he would take them. "Darling?"

Will hummed but did not otherwise respond.

"Will?"

Turning, Will looked at the side of Hannibal's face. He squeezed his hand to show that he was listening.

"I know that you have been hurt today by someone that you thought you could trust, but I want to remind you that you also learned that you are not helpless. If you ever do see Jack Crawford again, you have the choice to look him in the eyes and destroy him. You also have the choice to be a benevolent god and leave him to leave his pitiful existence. You have power over him, William. You have power over all of them."

Will squeezed Hannibal's hand in his once more before turning to look back out his window. He didn't bother to hide the small smile that rested on his lips.

XXX

"Did you enjoy watching the FBI storm the house and come up empty-handed?"

Hannibal looked up from his tablet to find Will watching him from the doorway of their bathroom. Some steam still hung in the air from Will's shower. "I listened to the conversation they had in the kitchen. There was evidence of all three of us being there so Jack ordered the coast to be searched for Dolarhyde's body. They will be alerting the airports and other various travel centers to be on the lookout for us."

"I guess he did bleed quite a bit, didn't he? Do we need to worry about that?"

Shaking his head, Hannibal shut off his tablet before setting it aside on his nightstand. "Are you ready to travel with me, Will?"

Smiling at that, Will entered the room. He approached the bed as he pulled his bottom lip in between his teeth. "I spoke with my doctor today."

Hannibal tilted his head to the side. "Oh? And what did he say?"

Will smiled as he looked up at Hannibal from underneath his eyelashes. "He released me from light duty. He said my wound was healing up nicely. I just need to make sure that I clean it well and to let him know if any redness appears. Otherwise, I'm perfectly fine to return to my normal life."

“That’s good news. I’m sure that you missed being able to do some of the things you used to do.”

“The shower was nice.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

Will toyed with the hem of his shirt before he pulled it open over his head. “You know, Hannibal, I haven’t been able to shower for over a week. Not properly, at least. So I took a really long one. I had to make sure that I was clean.”

Hannibal dipped his head into a nod but his eyes remained on Will’s. “That’s good.”

“It took me so long,” Will said as he lifted himself onto the bed. He crawled forward but stayed out of Hannibal’s reach. “Because I had to make sure that I was clean *everywhere*.”

A rumble came from deep in Hannibal’s chest. He did not show his surprise at how he responded to the idea of Will touching himself in their shower. “And are you?”

Will didn’t bother to hide his smirk as he sat up onto his knees. “Why don’t you come here and find out.”

Hannibal was certain that he had never moved so quickly in his life.

XXX

Epilogue One:

“William?”

“Hmmm?”

Hannibal squeezed the hand in his as he pulled into their driveway. “This is our estate. The one I was telling you about.”

Will blinked a few times before he turned to look out the front window and up at the house. A large gate blocked the driveway. There was a privacy fence that separated their yard from the surrounding fields. It was also located along the ocean, though the beach was less severe than the cliff had been in America. "This is lovely."

Hannibal lifted Will's hand to his lips to press a kiss to his knuckles before he released him to type a code into the controls for the gate. "I would like to do more traveling with you, but I had hoped that we could consider this house our home."

Unable to help the smile on his lips, Will leaned over the center console of the car. He caught Hannibal's chin in his hand and pulled him over for a kiss. "I would love that."

Hannibal cleared his throat as the gate finished opening. He searched Will's gaze for a moment before nodding and moving back into his seat once more. "I do have another surprise for you. I hope it is one that you will also love."

"You will spoil me, Hannibal."

"Good. I intend to."

Will covered his smile with his palm as he leaned his elbow on the console. He kept his gaze on the house as they approached along the long drive. "This is a beautiful estate."

"I had some changes made to better suit us."

"I'm sure we'll be very happy here."

Hannibal didn't reply as he parked their car and climbed out. He waited for Will to shut his door before he moved around to catch his hand. "I have something to show you before we go inside."

Studying Hannibal's face, Will slowly nodded. "All right. Show me."

The sound of barking filled the air the closer they got to the small building off to the side of the house. Hannibal felt Will freeze behind him. The tug on the hand he still held had him turning around. "Will?"

"Hannibal?"

The way his name was spoken had Hannibal stepping back into Will's space. He pulled his beloved into his arms and cradled him against his chest. "It's all right, Will. Just breathe."

"I know those barks, Hannibal. I know them."

"You do."

"This can't be possible."

Smiling at that, Hannibal brought Will's face up to press kisses across his cheeks and nose. "I would do anything for you."

Will didn't mean to sob. It bubbled up in his chest until it broke free with such force that Will found himself shoving his face back into Hannibal's neck.

Hannibal simply stood there and held him until he could move once more. "Are you ready?"

"Tell me how this is possible."

It was a demand that came out as more of a plea. Hannibal pressed another kiss to Will's forehead before he stepped slightly back. "They had someone living in your house and taking care of the dogs. It was an agent that was supposed to be on the lookout for me. He cared for the dogs but he didn't particularly like them. He never went to go look for them when they slowly started disappearing into the woods."

"You stole my dogs back for me?"

"All of them."

Will let out another sob before he pressed his lips to Hannibal's. He tore himself from his lover's arms and spun to face the building he now understood to be a kennel. "I love you."

Hannibal couldn't help the soft look in his eyes and the small besotted smile on his lips as he watched Will throw open the doors and shout at his dogs. The amount of noise that came from the small building had Hannibal lingering outside the door, but he stayed to watch as Will released them from their pens and sat down upon the floor with them. His darling allowed them to lick and nudge and bark and play as much as they liked as he snagged them each in for hugs and cuddles and kisses when he managed to get his hands on one of them.

He may have made mistakes with Will in the past, but Hannibal knew that there was nothing he wouldn't do to put the look of joy on Will's face as often as he could.

Through all the chaos, Will lifted his gaze and caught Hannibal's. The wendigo stood just outside the door in the late afternoon sun. It was the most beautiful creature that Will had ever seen. And it was his.

XXX

Epilogue Two:

Will stood before the bathroom mirror. He studied his own chin for a moment before sucking in a breath. He had told Hannibal that he would let him know when he was ready to look at his own soul. Well, he was ready. He just wasn't ready for Hannibal to know what he saw.

Stealing himself, Will lifted his gaze. He wasn't sure what he'd been expecting. Different ideas had flitted around in his mind for several days. Would his soul be beautiful like Alana's? Maybe it would be twisted and rotted like Dolarhyde's. He secretly hoped it would be transcendent like Hannibal's.

He knew now that the soul he'd seen when he'd looked into that dead woman's eyes in Georgia hadn't been his own. She hadn't actually been in the bed when he'd allowed the murders to replay in his mind. If anything, he'd seen Dolarhyde's twisted deformity of a soul in her eyes.

Deep in his eyes, Will saw himself. He was almost shocked that his soul looked so much like him. It was almost like looking into a mirror in a funhouse. He could see himself inside of himself. It was very strange.

That was until he noticed the small antlers sprouting from his head.

Will sucked in a gasp before tearing his gaze away from himself. He hurried from the bathroom to find Hannibal.

He wasn't transcendent. He was transcending.

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